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A Fifth Century Controversy on Grace: The Theology of Grace in Prosper of Aquitaine

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**A FIFTH CENTURY CONTROVERSY ON GRACE: THE
THEOLOGY OF GRACE IN PROSPER OF AQUITAINE**

by
José M. Pedrozo

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

December

1989

LAUS DEO VIRGINIQUE MATRI

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PREFACE

This thesis concerns the reception of the Augustinian teaching on grace in the fifth century, specifically the teachings on the absolute gratuity of grace, predestination and the universal salvific will of God. The purpose of this study is to analyze the contribution of Prosper of Aquitaine as an interpreter of the Augustinian position, in the light of the late 20th century re-evaluation of Semipelagianism.

After an examination of the historical and theological issues and the proximate circumstances that gave rise to the controversy, we proceed to examine the structure and content of all the relevant works on grace of Prosper. In the third chapter of the thesis I examine the method of Prosper more closely, his use of Sacred Scripture, his arguments and his interpretation of the more controversial points of St. Augustine's exposition on grace. I offer some conclusions about the reception of the Augustinian position, Prosper's role in this reception and possible developments in Prosper's own position.

Aside from scholarly debates, the issues mentioned above retain their vitality in other ways. For instance, the issue of predestination is of unquestionable importance in the ecumenical field. The issue of the divine salvific will has very important implications in missiology and our relations with non-Christian religions. There are, of course, many other historical aspects which add importance to the subject matter of this study but which I will not address.

VITA

The author, José Miguel Pedrozo, is the son of Francisco Pedrozo Pelegrín and Teresita Noa Cadalso. He was born on May 8, 1956, in Santa Clara, Cuba. Together with his parents and two brothers, Zoilo Francisco and Manuel Alberto, he has made the United States of America his home country since January 31, 1970.

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Mr. Pedrozo is married to Vilma Negrón and so far they have four children: María Fátima, Angela Cristina, Antonio José, and Tomás Alberto.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Around the year 412, St. Augustine wrote the first of his numerous works related to the Pelagian controversy. In fact, this often bitter polemic occupied the celebrated bishop of Hippo right up until the time of his death in 430. Throughout this controversy, the main object of Augustine's criticism was a religious anthropology which assumed the potential of human nature to realize itself through the human free will. This was the Pelagian outlook which conceived divine grace as analogous to human nature. One of the main consequences of the Pelagian controversy was the growing tendency to view divine grace as a rival to the human free will. From these questions on the relationship between human free will and divine grace a more subtle controversy emerged. The result was what history much closer to our own time has called "Semipelagianism". In this chapter, I propose to reexamine the history and the theological issues involved, concentrating on the first stages of the controversy.

As early as 397, at the beginning of his episcopacy, Augustine already had changed his mind on a very fundamental point. Previously he had believed that humans were able by the power of their own free will to take the first steps towards faith and salvation. In other words, Augustine had thought that the "first grace" (the beginning of faith) could be somehow merited. Only his deep reflection on Sacred Scripture led him to be convinced of his error.¹

1. E.g., 1 Cor 4, 7; Tit 3, 5; Rom 9, 15. 20; John 15, 5. It is interesting to note that Augustine's former opinions on the beginning of faith (*initium fidei*) were used against him by his adversaries in this controversy. Referring to this ironic turn of events Augustine writes:

Towards the end of 418 or the beginning of 419, Augustine wrote a letter to the Roman priest Sixtus (who later on would occupy the See of Peter as Sixtus III). The contents of this long letter are strongly anti-Pelagian and some of its formulas -- which emphasized the absolute gratuitousness of all divine gifts and strongly denied any human merit before the reception of this divine grace -- could be easily misunderstood. And so it happened. The first significant disagreement with the Augustinian teachings seems to have developed about eight years later in a monastery of Hadrumetum (present day Sousse, Tunisia). In a sense, it should not surprise anyone that the controversy would have emerged precisely in a monastery. It seemed inevitable that, in some cenobium, some monks would find the subtle Augustinian teachings irreconcilable with their own ideas on the ascetic life.

We can gather from a letter written to Augustine by Valentinus, the abbot of this monastery of Hadrumetum, that a young monk by the name of Florus had made a trip which took him through his former hometown of Uzala. Evodius, an old friend of Augustine, was at the time bishop of that city. In a monastery there Florus found the letter to Sixtus which apparently he copied. While he continued his trip to Carthage, Florus sent the copy of the letter to his brother monks in Hadrumetum by way of his traveling companion Felix.²

Upon his return, Florus found among some of the monks confusion and a strong reaction developing towards some teachings expressed in this letter. After the abbot Valentinus was made aware of the situation, it was decided

"...in qua sententia istos fratres nostros esse nunc video; quia non sicut legere libros meos, ita etiam in eis curaverunt proficere mecum." *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 4, 8.

2. All the historical and biographical data given here is taken from the letter of Valentinus to Augustine, *Epistola* 216, 2 (CSEL 57, 397). The phrase "imperitis fratribus", which alludes to those "less prepared" monks who found Augustine's letter to Sixtus hard to accept, can be found also in section 2 of this letter.

that Evodius should be consulted and asked to clarify the Augustinian teachings which seemed to negate human free will, the significance of human actions and even the truth of divine judgment. At the very least, it seemed to some of the monks that the Augustinian teachings rendered their ascetic way of life superfluous. But the efforts of the bishop of Uzala were for some reason or another unsatisfactory. Finally, the Hadrumetan abbot Valentinus permitted two of the monks, Cresconius and Felix, to travel to Hippo to verify the Augustinian authorship of the offending letter and that being the case, to request from Augustine himself some answers to the objections.³

Augustine received the young monks and charitably tried to provide for them the necessary explanations which they sought in trying to reconcile his teachings on divine grace and human free will.⁴ Besides the oral instructions, Augustine subsequently wrote two letters to Valentinus and his monks (*Epistola* 214 and 215 in Augustine's corpus of letters). In the first letter, by using an analogy with the christological titles of Savior and Judge, he explained how both divine grace and human free will could be reconciled. From the second letter we learn how the two inquiring monks were joined by a

3. See *Epistola* 214 of Augustine, *ad Valentinum* 1 (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (BAC), Obras de San Agustín, volume 11, pp. 1002-8).

4. The following is a well known Augustinian expression found in the letter to Sixtus which exemplifies the monks' main objection: "Quod est ergo meritum hominis ante gratiam, quo merito percipiat gratiam, cum omne bonum meritum nostrum non in nobis faciat nisi gratia; et cum Deus coronat merita nostra, nihil aliud coronet quam munera sua?" (*Epistola* 194, 19).

In this letter we also find a reference to the phrase *initium fidei* perhaps for the first time in the works of Augustine. It is used in his commentary to a verse of the biblical Song of Songs. Augustine follows a version of the Septuagint which translated into Latin renders the verse in question as "veni de Libano, sponsa mea, veni de Libano, venies et pertransies ab initio fidei." (Song 4, 8). He interprets the verse as referring to Christ and his spouse the Church. It might be of exegetical interest also to note that the Hebrew version of the text renders the last part of the verse as "depart from the peak of Amana" while the Septuagint reads "απο αρχης πιστεως."

third one also named Felix. Though anxious to return to their monastery, they were convinced by Augustine to stay a while longer, and as Easter time was near, the monks actually stayed to celebrate the Holy Week with Augustine. In the meantime they were further instructed on the pitfalls of the Pelagian teachings. Augustine also provided them with many of the Church documents by which these teachings had been anathematized.⁵ He even took the time to write a new book, *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, addressed to the abbot Valentinus and the rest of the Hadrumetan community.

The monks who consulted Augustine must have been somewhat overwhelmed by the treatment they received from the renowned bishop of Hippo and after Easter they returned to Hadrumetum temporarily satisfied. But new difficulties and new distorted applications of the Augustinian teachings arose among them. Some reasoned as follows: If our ability to do good works depends upon a gift, how can we be admonished or reproved for not accomplishing these good works (i.e. for lacking the gift of perseverance)?⁶ Thus the monks came to the false conclusion that fraternal correction was useless. On hearing of this type of reasoning and still

5. *Epistola* 215 of Augustine, *ad Valentinum* 2 (BAC volume 11, p. 1010): "Portant autem secum et alia, quae vobis dirigenda esse credidimus, quibus cognoscatis quemadmodum catholica Ecclesia, in Dei misericordia, Pelagianae haeresis venena repulerit. Quod enim scriptum est ad papam Innocentium romanae urbis episcopum, de concilio provinciae Carthaginensis et de concilio Numidia, et aliquanto diligentius an quinque episcopis, et quae ipse ad tria ista rescripsit; item quod papae Zosimo de Africano concilio scriptum est, eiusque rescriptum ad universos totius orbis episcopos missum; et quod posteriori concilio plenario totius Africae contra ipsum errorem breviter constituimus; et supra memoratum librum meum, quem modo ad vos scripsi: haec omnia et in praesenti legimus cum ipsis, et per eos misimus vobis."

6. This is essentially the same question which the Pelagians posed: If the choice to good or evil depends on a cause extrinsic to the human will, can we still be held responsible for our choice?

attempting to reconcile the basic inability of human nature to do "good" works (meaning "salvific" works) with the role of human accountability for its own evil actions, Augustine wrote another book (c. 426-427) appropriately entitled *De correptione et gratia* and sent it to the Hadrumetan monks via the monk Florus, who had travelled to Hippo with a letter from Valentius explaining to Augustine the course of the disturbance (letter no. 216).

But not only from Hadrumetum, also from other parts of North Africa one could hear disturbed and dissenting voices rising against the Augustinian teachings on grace. For example, at about the same time that this was happening in Hadrumetum, a certain Vitalius wrote to Augustine from Carthage objecting to his teachings of the divine action in the *initium fidei*. Augustine's long reply has been preserved in his *Epistola 217 ad Vitalem*. This letter provides an excellent summary of the Augustinian positions which were to become key issues in the "semipelagian" controversy. These include, after an initial affirmation of original sin, 1) the gratuity and necessity of divine grace for all, even infants, and 2) a distribution of divine grace which in particular rejects the teaching that the death of non-baptized infants is a punishment for the sins which God foresaw they would have committed had they lived to a more mature age.

Another significant aspect of the Augustinian teachings appear in this letter. This aspect -- which could be called "pastoral" -- is often overlooked but it is important to realize that for Augustine (as well as for his disciple Prosper as we shall see) the ultimate confirmation as to the truth of a theological position was found in the practice of the Church. So for instance, how does one know that faith is an absolutely gratuitous gift from God? Because the Church, always and everywhere, has prayed to obtain faith for unbelievers. And how does one know that perseverance is an equally

absolutely gratuitous gift from God? Because similarly the Church prays in thanksgiving for the conversion and the salvation of sinners.

Even though these events from Hadrumetum and Carthage gave evidence of the resistance to the Augustinian teachings on grace, it was in Southern Gaul, especially at Marseille and Lerins (hence the term Massilian), that the real opposition arose. It was in fifth century Gaul where the reception of "Augustinianism" was to be tested most profoundly.

Shortly after the first decade of the fifth century the island monastery of Lerins (off the coast of modern day Cannes) and the monastery of St. Victor in Marseille were founded, the former by Honoratus, a young man of noble birth, later bishop of Arles⁷ and the latter by John Cassian, one of the more influential figures in Western monasticism and a key figure in this controversy. We do not have many biographical details on Cassian. Neither the date of his birth nor of his death is known with certainty (c. 360 - c. 435). His birthplace is equally unknown although Gennadius of Marseille indicates Scythia minor as most probable.⁸ We do not know exactly when he became a monk although it must have been shortly after his adolescence when he went with his close friend Germanus to seek admission among the cenobites of Palestine in Bethlehem. We also know that he travelled to Egypt where he spent a considerable amount of time among the desert ascetics.⁹ He left

7. The biographical details can be found in the *Sermo de vita S. Honorati* by Hilarius of Arles (PL 50, 1249-72).

8. Gennadius was a late fifth century Gallic historian author of the *De viris inlutrbus*. Cassian's biographical data can be found in section 62 (61). The reference is taken from *Patrology*, volume 4, edited by Angelo di Berardino and introduced by John Quasten (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1986).

9. This is deduced from Cassian's *Collationes* X through XX where Cassian writes as if several of these abbots were the actual teachers.

Palestine and Egypt permanently around 399 and travelled to the East. In Constantinople he was ordained a deacon by John Chrysostom in the first years of the fifth century.¹⁰ Around 405, when John Chrysostom was for a second time in exile, Cassian went to Rome where eventually he was ordained to the priesthood before finally coming to Gaul and establishing the monastery of St. Victor at Marseille between 415 and 417.

A sign of the influence and reputation which he enjoyed in later years (even beyond Gaul itself) is the fact that it was Cassian who towards the end of 429 was asked by the Roman deacon (later pope) Leo to respond to the challenge of Nestorius' denial of the *Theotokos*. The abbot of St. Victor was well prepared for this task linguistically as well as culturally having lived for so long in the East. Using the information taken from the first letters (written in Greek) of Nestorius to pope Celestine I and from certain extracts of Nestorius' own sermons, Cassian eventually wrote *De incarnatione Christi contra Nestorium*. Significantly, in this book Cassian argued that the ideas of Nestorius, however different from the views of Pelagius, were logically equivalent to Pelagianism.

It was in these monasteries of Gaul under Cassian's leadership that the main opposition to the Augustinian teachings on grace arose. Between 427 and 429, the situation was such that two ardent followers of Augustine who lived in Gaul alerted him by letters to the controversy that his doctrines were generating in Marseille and its surroundings. These two men were Hilarius and Tiro Prosper of Aquitaine. Not much is known about either of the

10. Cassian's *De incarnatione* 7, 31, 1 (CSEL, 17, 389): "Unde ego quoque ipse, humilis atque obscurus nomine sicut merito, licet mihi inter eximios Constantinopolitanae urbis antistites locum magistri usurpare non possim, studium tamen discipuli affectumque praesumo, *adoptatus enim a beatissimae memoriae Iohanne episcopo in ministerium sacrum atque oblatus deo*,..."

two.¹¹ Hilarius, not to be confused with the bishop of Arles, was a layman who was personally acquainted with Augustine probably having lived and studied with him in Africa. It is known that he wrote other letters to Augustine from Gaul although only one has survived (Epistola 226 in Augustine's corpus of letters). Prosper never met Augustine, as he himself writes in the preface of his only surviving letter to the bishop of Hippo. He was probably also a layman who was closely associated with some of the monasteries of the region, a sort of lay monk which was not uncommon at the time.¹²

Augustine replied to these two letters with a bipartite work; the *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* and the *De dono perseverantiae*. These books emphasized once again the teachings that the grace of God is not given according to our merits and that predestination and perseverance are pure gifts from God who calls us in order to believe rather than because we believe. Augustine also reiterates that if we say that faith comes from ourselves and that as a reward to our willingness we receive other gifts from God, we simply come to the Pelagian position that grace is given according to our merits. However, there were some questions (e.g., why one is elected and another not?) which Augustine admits can be answered only by affirming the inscrutability of God's judgment. Nevertheless, Augustine does not fail to show the pastoral significance of this mystery. The situation invites all Christians to a deeper sense of prayer and calls them to a humble trust in God which is crucial in avoiding the extremes of presumption and despair in

11. Once again, the meager biographical data on Prosper of Aquitaine originates from Gennadius of Marseille, *De viris illustribus* 85 (84).

12. Not until the time of St. Benedict were monks usually members of the clergy. In Prosper's time, the monastic rank was quite distinct from the clerical state.

the road to salvation. As for the rest, there is no apology or mitigation in Augustine's words and the controversy continued.

While awaiting Augustine's reply to his letter, Prosper wrote a long poem, the *Carmen de ingratis*, which dealt with Pelagianism, the ensuing Massilian controversy and the connections between the two. The poem is a passionate piece of poetry but it did no more than summarize the Augustinian position and expressed it in a different literary genre. Augustine died shortly after in August of 430 and another period in the dispute emerged. Prosper threw himself completely into the debate and became Augustine's first expositor and defender against the Massilians. His first work after 430 was probably his answers to several excerpts taken out of context by two Genoan priests from the aforementioned Augustinian bipartite reply to the letters of Prosper and Hilarius. Two other pamphlets followed in close succession¹³, each answering distortions of the Augustinian doctrines which apparently were circulating in the vicinity of Marseille and Lerins.

The controversy was developing in such a way that Prosper and his associate Hilarius sought help from the Apostolic See in settling the dispute.¹⁴ Prosper probably felt confident in expecting a favorable verdict from the bishop of Rome since Celestine (pope from 422 until 432) had battled the Pelagians vigorously and as Prosper asserted, the Massilians in general had a theological kinship to the Pelagians. But the leader of the Massilian monks was John Cassian (and recall that about two years before he had played a very important role in the Nestorian affair). We can imagine that

13. These two pamphlets are: 1) the answers to the objections of the Gauls and 2) the answers to the Vincentian articles.

14. The chronology of this trip and the three works (answers to the excerpts of the Genoese, answers to the Gauls, answers to the Vincentian articles) is uncertain.

this fact was not conducive at all for Celestine to be fully convinced of the alleged tendencies of Cassian towards Pelagian ideas. Furthermore, Celestine did not seem to have undertaken a serious look at all the doctrinal questions involved in the Massilian controversy. Nevertheless, Prosper's trip to Rome was the occasion of a letter of Celestine to the bishops of Gaul.¹⁵ Even though Celestine treats the issues under debate generically, the competency, doctrinal soundness, and the person of Augustine were eulogized by Celestine when he writes:

" Augustine, a man whose life and even merits have remained in holy memory, was always in communion with us; never did a sinister suspicion fall upon him: So great was his knowledge as we can recall that those before me always held him among the best teachers. Thus everyone held him in high esteem as someone who reflected love and honor on all."¹⁶

The rest of the letter is disciplinary in tone. It points to the bishops' connivance in the matter and it instructs them to put a stop to the discord and the accusations that "certain presbyters" levelled upon "teachers whose disciples they had not been."¹⁷ All of this is said in reference to Augustine

15. *Epistola 21, B. Coelestini papae ad episcopos Galliarum* (PL 50, 528-530).

16. *Ibid.*, PL 50, 530 A: "Augustinum sanctae recordationis virum pro vita sua atque meritis in nostra communione semper habuimus, nec umquam hunc sinistrae suspicionis saltem rumor aspersit: quem tantae scientiae olim fuisse meminimus, ut inter magistros optimos etiam ante a meis semper decessoribus haberetur. Bene ergo de eo omnes in communi senserunt, utpote qui ubique cunctis et amoris fuerit et honori."

17. *Ibid.*: "...Filii nostri praesentes, Prosper et Hilarius, quorum circa Deum nostrum sollicitudo laudanda est, tantum nescio quibus presbyteris illic licere qui dissensionem ecclesiarum studeant, sunt apud nos persecuti ut indisciplinatas quaestiones vocantes in medium pertinaciter eos dicant praedicare adversantes veritati. Se vestrae dilectioni iustius imputamus, quando illi supra vos habent copiam disputandi. Legimus supra magistrum non esse discipulum, hoc est, non sibi debere quem quam in injuriam doctorum vindicare doctrinam. Nam et hos ipsos a Deo nostro positos novimus ad docendum; cum sit, dicente Apostolo eis tertius locus intra Ecclesiam deputandus. Quid illic spei est, ubi, magistri

and the Massilians. So it is perhaps noteworthy how the author of the famous *Commonitorium* uses the contents of Celestine's letter without ever mentioning the name of Augustine even in places where it would have been natural to do so.¹⁸

Back in Gaul, Prosper apparently came across a copy of Cassian's *XIII Conference*. As a final attempt to refute the Massilians he wrote the *De gratia Dei et libero arbitrio liber contra Collatorem*. The attempt was not too successful in several ways as we shall see. Nevertheless, with Cassian's death (c. 435) the controversy seems to have died down. Prosper himself settled permanently in Rome where he was of service to pope Leo I. During this truce several other important works -- indirectly associated with the controversy -- were written. Among these are, 1) the *Capitula* or

tacentibus, ii loquuntur qui, si ita est, *eorum discipuli non fuerunt?...*Desinat, si ita res sunt, *incessere novitas vetustatem*."

18. For example, the names of Ambrose (in chapter 5), Cyprian (ch. 6), Hilary of Poitiers (ch. 18) and popes Sixtus and Celestine (ch. 32) are all praised. Moreover, since a good part of the *Commonitorium* deals with the "antiquity and universality of the Catholic faith against the novelties of all heresies," the following names are displayed as authorities: Athanasius, Basil, Cyril, Cyprian, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and many other authors quoted at Ephesus (ch. 30 and 31). But the name of Augustine is conspicuously absent from this litany of saints, even when the Donatist heresy is discussed.

The "Pellegrinus", pseudonym of the author of the *Commonitorium*, has been usually thought to be Vincent of Lerins (also thought to be the author of an scurrilous pamphlet against Augustine's teachings on grace which we will discuss in chapter 2 of this thesis). But it is interesting to note that after the discovery of the *Excerpta* (discovered and attributed to Vincent by José Madoz, S.J. in a published work of 1940) the thesis of the "anti-Augustinianism" of Vincent of Lerins had to be considerably modified, for not only does the name of Augustine appear in the *Excerpta* but it is given a place of honor as model of the Fathers. The answer given by Madoz is not very satisfying in my opinion. He compromises by saying that the compliments of the *Excerpta* are paid to the Doctor of the Trinity and the Incarnation while the veiled antipathy of the *Commonitorium* is directed towards the Doctor of grace and predestination. Cf. J. Madoz, *Excerpta Vincentii Lirinensis*, Estudios Onienses, serie 1, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1940). See also his work, *El concepto de la Tradición en S. Vicente de Lerins*, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, vol. 5 (Roma, 1933).

Praeteritorum Sedis Apostolicae Episcoporum Auctoritates de gratia Dei, 2) the *Liber sententiarum ex operibus S. Augustini delibatarum*, and 3) the *De vocatione omnium gentium*.

The first of these three works is usually attached to Celestine's *Epistola* 21 to the Gallic episcopacy. Although the Prosperian authorship of this work is not beyond question, it is clearly not part of Celestine's original letter. This document is of great doctrinal significance. It was of important use not only in the fifth and sixth centuries, but also in the predestinarian controversies of later centuries.¹⁹ The second work mentioned above is clearly of Prosperian authorship. It consists of 392 Augustinian sayings, of course all out of the original context. But through them Augustinian thought was made known to subsequent ages.²⁰ The synod of Orange (529) used this work in many of its canons which were in turn used by the council of Trent in its decrees on justification and grace. Besides its importance in conciliar history, this work has a special literary importance. Together with Vincent's *Excerpta*, it seems to be a prototype of the florigelium genre so popular in the middle ages.

During this final period of Prosper's life at Rome, the book *De vocatione omnium gentium* appeared. This treatise, among the first to deal

19. In this document we find what could be considered simply a prudent reservation placed on the profound and difficult questions of the controversy. For example, the last section (no. 10) states: "Profundiores vero difficilioresque partes incurrentium quaestionum, quas latius pertractarunt, qui haereticis restiterunt, sicut non audemus contemnere, ita non necesse habemus adstruere, quia ad confitendum gratiam Dei, cuius operi ac dignationi nihil penitus subtrahendum est, satis sufficere credimus, quidquid secundum praedictas regulas Apostolicae Sedis nos scripta docuerunt: ut prorsus non opinemur catholicum, quod apparuerit praefixis sententiis esse contrarium." In my opinion, too much is made of the fact that Augustine's name does not appear in the *Capitula* (the question is, why should it appear?).

20. We might also add that Augustinian thought has been often distorted by the careless use of these out-of-context statements.

with the salvation of non-Christians, has been attributed also to Prosper with some degree of probability by modern scholarship. History does not hear from Prosper again after 455. This is the year in which his *Chronica*, a history of the world which he had been working on, ends abruptly.²¹

Even before Prosper's death the first period of the controversy could be said to have ended. There were several years of peace and tranquility between the followers of Augustine and the disciples of the Massilian position. But a second, more complicated phase erupted following certain writings of Faustus, abbot of the monastery at Lerins since 433 and later bishop of Riez.

Around 473, a synod at Arles had dealt with the predestinarian doctrines of the Gallic priest Lucidus. Faustus was appointed to summarize the points of doctrine and he eventually wrote his well known *De gratia et libero arbitrio*. This work apparently found no opposition in Gaul even though it clearly went beyond Cassian's own teachings as found in his *XIII Conference*. However, this is hardly surprising since many of the Gallic bishops favored, to say the least, the Massilian system over the Augustinian teachings. It is a historical fact that the monastery of Lerins was a breeding ground of prospective Gallic bishops during that era.

However, by the beginning of the sixth century, Faustus' work -- which clearly attributed to the human will the initiative towards salvation -- found strong opposition from a group of "Scythian monks" who further complicated matters with a christological controversy of their own. They asked the exiled African bishop Possessor to rule on the orthodoxy of Faustus who by this time had been long dead (c. 493). Possessor himself seems to have consulted the

21. See the article of Adalbert Hamman in *Patrology*, vol. IV, edited by Angelo di Berardino and introduced by J. Quasten, pp. 551-58, for these and other details on the works of Prosper.

matter with Hormisdas, the bishop of Rome. Hormisdas, in a letter dated around 520, did not censure the writings of Faustus but neither did he regard them as "in auctoritate patrum".²² The pope refers to the "various books of St. Augustine" and to the *Capitula* allegedly of Prosperian origins but long since attached to the letter of Celestine to the Gallic episcopacy.²³

The Scythian monks also proposed the matter of the orthodoxy of Faustus to some exiled African bishops in Sardinia. Fulgentius of Ruspe, also known for his christological writings, responded in the name of the bishops opposing the "semipelagian" position of Faustus. But despite all efforts it seems that the whole muddled affair might have gone on indefinitely had it not been for Caesarius of Arles. This bishop had been a monk at Lerins. Of course, his training there had made him very familiar with the Massilian teachings and in particular with the writings of Cassian and Faustus. But he had also studied at length the writings of Augustine. Caesarius eventually presided over the synod of Orange in 529 which won approval for many of the Augustinian teachings.

This synod (also known as the Second Council of Orange) was virtually ignored during the middle ages. It was attended by only a handful of Gallic bishops so it was more of a synod than a council. But its doctrinal significance is not questioned in the Church, especially after the use that

22. *Epistola 70, Ad Possessorem episcopum* (PL 63, 492 B): "Neque illum recipi, neque quemquam, quos in auctoritate Patrum non recipit examen catholicae fidei, aut ecclesiasticae disciplinae ambiguitatem posse gignere, aut religiosi praeiudicium comparare."

23. PL 63, 493 A: "De arbitrio tamen libero, et gratia Dei, quod romana (hoc est catholica) sequatur et asseveret Ecclesia, licet in variis libris beati Augustini, et maxime ad Hilarium et Prosperum, possit cognosci, tamen in scriniis ecclesiasticis expressa capitula continentur, quae sibi desunt, et necessaria creditis, destinabimus, quanquam qui diligenter apostoli dicta considerat, quid sequi debeat evidenter cognoscat."

Trent made of its canons. The acts of the synod of Orange consist of a preface and a final profession of faith together with 25 canons, all of which are borrowed more or less literally from Augustine's writings. In the majority of the cases they are verbally identical with one of Prosper's *Sententiae*.²⁴ For example, canon 5 appears to be a compendium of the main theses in the *De praedestinatione sanctorum* and vindicates Prosper's position on the *initium fidei*. Canon 6 states that it is not correct to say that divine grace is imparted to us when we, by our own strength, ask, seek and knock. Rather it is divine grace that works in us so that we believe, ask, etc. The text of this canon has clear analogues in the *De dono perseverantiae* and Prosper's *Contra Collatorem*. Canon 8 contradicts the teaching of Cassian in his *XIII Conference* by affirming that it is not correct to say that some attain divine grace by the mercy of God while others do it by their own free will however weakened by Adam's sin.

Despite some historical difficulties connected with the origin of the conciliar text itself, the result remains the same; this synod of Orange in 529 provided a mortal blow to the Massilian positions and at the same time the Augustinian teachings -- clarified and with reservations placed on the subtle issues related to predestination -- were sanctioned by the Church.²⁵

24. The first eight canons are in the form of decrees and the last seventeen are in the form of sentences. A complete analysis can be found in Charles Hefele, *History of the Councils of the Church*, vol. 4 (AD 451 to AD 680), AMS Press reprint from 1895 edition, pp. 152-67. Cf. also J. Patout Burns, S.J., *Theological Anthropology*, chapter 7, in the series *Sources of Early Christian Thought*, edited by W. Rusch (Fortress Press, 1981). For the critical edition in Latin, I have consulted the *Corpus Christianorum* (series latina) 148A, pp. 53 - 73.

25. It is true that the conciliar text itself shows some reservations. For instance, it makes no explicit affirmation about predestination to salvation or to grace although it explicitly condemns predestination to evil. Nevertheless, canon 20 reads: "A person can do nothing good without God. God does many things in a person which the person himself does not do, but the person does no good things which God does not provide that the person do." Also

Since the writings of Augustine refuting Pelagianism contained the teachings with which the Massilians disagreed, a theological setting of the controversy should include at least a brief look at Pelagianism itself.

The underlying idea of the Pelagian system is not simply its essential denial of the supernatural order. It is true that the Pelagian view by its "naturalism" has devastating consequences for many central Christian ideas such as the fall, original sin, the necessity of baptism, the significance of Christ, his redemptive sacrifice and the divinization of humanity taught by Augustine but even more characteristic of the Greek Fathers. But at the heart of the Pelagian outlook was a notion of the freedom of the human will which proclaimed its absolute independence in relationship to God. This notion stands in sharp contrast against the idea of the fundamental insufficiency of fallen humanity in the Augustinian system. Nothing differentiates Augustine more from Pelagius than the recognition of the fact that to be free is not the same as to have a free will. From the Augustinian perspective freedom is ultimately experienced in the loss of freedom to sin.²⁶ From the Pelagian outlook free will meant nothing else than the possibility of doing good or doing evil. Julian of Eclanum, an expositor of Pelagianism and Augustine's young nemesis in the final phase of the Pelagian polemics, did not hesitate to speak

Canon 12 states: "God loves us as we will be by his own gift, not as we are by our merits." These two canons along with the use of 1 Cor 4, 7 ["What have you that you have not received?"] in the final definition of faith of the synod seems to me to be tantamount to the principle of predilection which is the key point in Augustine's definition of predestination.

26. *De correptione et gratia* 12, 33: "Prima ergo libertas voluntatis erat, posse non peccare; novissima erit multo maior, non posse peccare. Prima immortalitas erat posse non mori; novissima erit multo maior, non posse mori. Prima erat perseverantiae potestas, bonum posse non deserere; novissima erit felicitas perseverantiae, bonum non posse deserere." (BAC, Obras de San Agustín, volume 6, p. 178).

of humanity's "emancipation from God" by the possession of its free will. And Pelagius himself would assert that the will is not free if it needs the help of God.²⁷

It is important to remember that Pelagius was not a philosopher. He was a rigorous ascetic, a moralist who directed souls for many years especially among the well-to-do Christians. The Pelagian anthropological outlook sprang forth to a great extent as a protest against the laxity of many wealthy Christians of that age. We do not claim, of course, that this phenomenon is unique in Christian history. In fact, at about the same period in time, in the West we have the example of St. Jerome, whose indignation was aroused by the extreme worldliness of the Christians among the Roman aristocracy. Some of his witty sarcasm and vehement denunciations have been preserved for us in his unforgettable letters. Similarly in the East, we have St. John Chrysostom who devoted so much of his energy and talents as orator in attacking the laxity of his people that he became a "nuisance" to the worldly Christians of his fold. But unlike Jerome and John, and despite his experience in directing souls, Pelagius seems to have had an inadequate understanding of human nature.

If we coupled these observations with the prevalent atmosphere of decadence and syncretism of Christian and pagan ideas (especially from Stoicism), then it helps us to put into perspective the dreadful rigorism which characterized many of the Pelagian teachings. For example, Pelagius would

27. Julian's statement is quoted by Augustine in *Op. Imp. contra Iul.* 1, 78: "Libertas arbitrii, qua a Deo emancipatus homo est, in admittendi peccati et abstinendi a peccati possibilitate consistit." Likewise Pelagius' assertion is taken from Augustine's *De gestis Pelagii* 18, 42: "In decimo capitulo: 'Non est liberum arbitrium si Dei indiget auxilio, quoniam in propria voluntate habet unusquisque aut facere aliquid, aut non facere.'" (BAC, Obras de San Agustín, volume 9, p. 744).

condemn the rich simply for not renouncing their wealth. In fact, in the Pelagian outlook of morality all good acts became obligatory and anyone guilty of the slightest offense was no longer a member of the Church. Furthermore, one could be reprobated for all eternity for the offense, however small. It is interesting to note that at the synod of Diospolis (December 415) the bishops gathered demanded from Pelagius a retraction to one of his assertions to the effect that on the day of judgment no mercy would be shown to sinners.²⁸

The Pelagian view of freedom of the human will and this rigorism was to have a profound effect on the Pelagian notion of grace. First of all, Pelagians applied the term "grace" to the gifts of creation. That is, they applied it to natural qualities in human nature which are good because their Creator is good. Grace was something that humanity enjoyed as part of its nature so Pelagians could say that it was indeed by "grace" that we could choose to be with or without sin. Secondly, Pelagians used the term "grace" as enlightenment of our natural capabilities. Thus for instance, they assigned an extremely important place to the Law in the Old Testament and to the teaching of Jesus whose role was essentially reduced to an example in what one ought to do. In summary, the Pelagian conception of grace was in terms of an initial forgiveness of sins by Christ, followed by an inspiration based on the Law and the life of Christ inciting us to the practice of perfect justice.²⁹

In a historical and theological setting of "Semipelagianism", I believe it is important to consider the issues within a framework of "Christian

28. Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo; life and controversies*, Revised 1986 edition (Canterbury Press Norwich), pp. 335-40.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

spirituality". This is important in view of the fact that it was the different theologico-anthropological outlooks (and thus "spiritualities") which were at the root of the controversy. This consideration seems all the more natural if one recalls that the most able expositor among the "semipelagians" was John Cassian, the famous author of the *Collationes* or conferences, who otherwise has so many merits in the history of Christian spirituality. Moreover, it is almost trite to say that Augustine's own conversion experience influenced much of his outlook. In other words, the Augustinian exposition of the issues owes much to his own spirituality.

Basically, Cassian maintained that in the act of faith -- from which all must begin for one cannot please God without faith -- there is a beginning, a development and a consummation. Moreover, in the beginning of faith (*initium fidei*) there are three distinguishing factors; the adherence to faith, the desire for salvation that emanates from faith and finally our invocation for divine assistance. I do not think that either Augustine or Prosper would have denied any of this. The difference was that in Cassian's spirituality all of the three aforementioned factors were the result of the human free will while Augustine's own conversion experience suggested to him that this could not be the case. So it is clear that the "semipelagians" did not deny the action of divine grace in humans. They simply limited its influence in the total process towards union with God, giving priority (however small) to human initiative in the beginning stage.

There was one additional difference between Cassian's and Augustine's spirituality. Augustine had written that "in between the beginning of faith and the perfecting of perseverance there are all those things by which we live a righteous life, things which they (Cassian and the Massilians)

also embrace as gifts from God through faith."³⁰ In other words, Cassian's ascetic outlook viewed final perseverance not as a gift (as Augustine did), but as a reward for our willingness. Within this framework I believe the real issues are best understood.

Finally, a brief look at the origins of the term "Semipelagianism" is in order. This name commonly used in our time to denote the opinions of John Cassian and the Massilians was coined probably in the late 16th century from the dispute generated by two Spanish theologians, Luis de Molina (1535-1601) of the Society of Jesus and Domingo Bañez (1528-1604) of the Order of Preachers. This dispute led to the *De auxiliis* conferences (1590-1607) which ended with no definite pronouncement from the Church but apparently a new term in the history of doctrine was born. Nevertheless, only in the 17th century did the usage of the term become more common.³¹ The term "Semipelagian" is somewhat misleading when applied to people like John Cassian. It may give the idea that, while not adopting all the teachings of Pelagius, he defended certain others. The term is not accurate also in the sense of placing Cassian somewhere between the Pelagians -- who glorified the primacy of human nature and free will at the expense of divine grace -- and Augustine -- who wished to assert the absolute gratuity of divine grace but without prejudice to the human free will.

30. *De dono perseverantiae* 21, 56: "Inter initium fidei et perfectionem perseverantiae media illa sunt quibus recte vivimus, quae ipsi etiam donari nobis a Deo mediante fide consentium."

31. Cf. M. Jacquin, O.P., "A quelle date apparaît le term 'semipélagien'?" *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* I (1907): 506-8.

Although in the middle ages there is no trace of the term "semipelagian", it is noteworthy that St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa contra Gentiles* (bk. 3) well defines the Catholic teaching of the *initium fidei*, a denial of which is attributed to the Pelagians. And in the *Summa Theologica* (I, 23.5) he clearly distinguishes between the doctrines of Pelagius and some Pelagian teachings (which would be denoted in later centuries as "semipelagian").

Since the opposition in Southern Gaul to the Augustinian doctrines was not truly out of sympathy to Pelagius' point of view, some historians have suggested the term "anti-Augustinianism" as an alternative. But the new term is not helpful in eliminating the possible misunderstandings. In fact, it just "sweeps the dirt under the rug." One is left in need of defining what is meant by "Augustinianism", a very tendentious term in itself. Therefore, we must note certain points in favor of the standard terminology.

First of all, Pelagianism does deny fundamentally the absolute gratuity and necessity of grace. Even critics of the term "semipelagian" admit that in rejecting the Augustinian teachings on grace many less able than Cassian approached the Pelagian doctrines.³² Therefore, historically speaking, there is something to be said in favor of the accuracy of the term.

Second, although the term "semipelagian" is anachronistic and could be misleading, the point is not whether or not Cassian and his followers desired to subscribe to Pelagian ideas. The point should be that their opinions (on the *initium fidei*, for example) logically led to positions closely attuned to Pelagian notions. It is true that the controversy could be called "anti-Augustinian" for it was the result of an excessive reaction to certain ideas of Augustine in conceiving the distribution of divine grace and the role of the human free will in the divine salvific plan. It is also true that the geographical term "Massilian" is also historically accurate -- Prosper himself used it. But the term "semipelagian" is descriptive and thus, I maintain, appropriate. After all, in analyzing the different types of conversions -- the

32. See for example the statements of O. Chadwick in his monograph on John Cassian (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 127-28. On page 127 Chadwick categorically asserts that the name semipelagian is "wrong." But on the following page he adds, "but in rejecting the teaching of Augustine there were some among them who approach the Pelagian doctrine."

apostle Paul, Zacchaeus, Matthew, Cornelius, the good thief -- Cassian concluded that sometimes grace is previous to human efforts but other times it was obtained as a reward after asking, knocking and searching (cf. Mat 7, 7). Therefore, one could say Cassian placed himself in a "semi" position. Many of Cassian's opinions are otherwise irreproachable especially when given a charitable interpretation. But the same cannot be said of the thought and expressions of his less nuanced followers.³³ It is with this more general group in mind that "Semipelagianism" is accurately said to be a remnant of Pelagianism.³⁴

33. Of course, the same could be said of Augustine's disciples, especially "expositors" of later centuries. As G. Bonner has wittily written, "it may be admitted that Augustine has not been altogether fortunate in his disciples. Any author who numbers Gottschalk, Calvin, and Cornelius Jansen among his expositors is much to be pitied." *op. cit.*, p. 312.

34. While distinct in appearance, logically they were very much related. Thus Prosper calls them "Pelagianae pravitatis reliquiis" (*Ad Aug.*, PL 51, 72 D).

CHAPTER II

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE RELEVANT PROSPERIAN WORKS

Prosper's theology of grace has to be deduced from a series of controversial works composed in a particular situation and with a particular purpose. Our task is to decide what emphasis should be placed upon a particular work in the course of the Massilian controversy or even upon particular remarks in these works. In order to minimize the problems created by focusing too narrowly on a work, I shall examine all the known Prosperian works prior to 435. This task is facilitated by the fact that their number is small (7 total) and all of them are relatively short documents. But I shall certainly consider several other Prosperian works dated after 435 related to the subject matter at hand.¹ Needless to say, I shall often refer to the writings of Augustine and for the other point of view, Cassian himself.

2.1 AD RUFINUM

The first known works of Prosper of Aquitaine are in fact two letters which are closely associated with the Massilian controversy: the *Epistola ad Rufinum* and the *Epistola ad Augustinum*. Prosper tells us in the letter to Augustine that it was by chance that he came to know of the book *De correptione et gratia*, the work known to have been composed around 427 by

1. This date is not arbitrary of course. After Cassian's death (c. 435) the Massilian controversy seems to have died down until it was revived (at a different level) in the last part of the fifth century starting with Faustus of Riez (c. 473).

Augustine as a second attempt to answer the objections of the monks at Hadrumetum. Because of the similarity in the objections, Prosper thought this book would settle all the Massilian grievances as well. However, this was not to be the case. We note that in the letter to Rufinus Prosper seems to be unaware of the existence of this book. This simple internal evidence is the only reason to date *ad Rufinum* as the first of these two letters, probably written around the end of 426 or beginning of 427.²

In general, the works of Prosper cannot be considered systematic theological presentations by any stretch of the imagination. They belong to the polemical or the apologetical genres. The letter to Rufinus is no exception. The arguments given employ the classical rhetorical techniques; foremost among these, the arguments *ex auctoritate* and the *reductio ad absurdum* or indirect argument. All this reflects a latin scholar trained in the classical schools typical of Prosper's time and cultural setting. Nevertheless, despite his controversialist style of writing, we find that Prosper is able to go to the heart of the theological issues involved. In fact, this letter could be considered a brief treatise on Prosper's theology of grace. It is addressed to a certain Rufinus -- not to be confused with his more famous namesake from Aquileia -- who seems to have been simply a friend of Prosper and is otherwise unknown in history. The letter itself is a relatively lengthy piece divided into twenty sections including a prologue and an epilogue. There is

2. In the epilogue of the letter, Prosper reassures Rufinus that the opposition in Gaul will die down just as in the case of another disturbance which had been quieted in another part of the world ("Confide ergo in virtute misericordiae Dei, quoniam haec contradictio, sicut in allis mundi partibus, ita et in his regionibus conquiescet."). This disturbance is probably the one in Hadrumetum. Since Prosper suggests to Rufinus that he seek in Augustine's works further enlightenment on the questions on grace which are being debated but makes no mention of the book as he does in the letter *ad Augustinum*, we assume that he probably had not seen the work yet.

no evidence that the purpose of this letter is anything other than that which is specifically stated in its prologue, namely, to inform the addressee about the rumors he may have heard on the brewing controversy and to reassure him that it would subside quickly.³

In the first four sections of the letter, with characteristic Augustinian emphasis, Prosper proposes to show that the teaching of the Gauls or Massilians reduces to the opinion that God's grace is given in answer to human merit or initiative.⁴ Augustine himself tells us in his *Retractiones* (cf. 2.1) and his writings to Simplicianus, successor of Ambrose as bishop of Milan, that he himself had held the opinion of the Massilians prior to 397. Only his deep reflection on the Pauline text "what have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4, 7), led him to be convinced of his error and to his death he defended the principle that God, in a completely gratuitous manner, gives us not only the grace to be able to keep the commandments but even the grace to take the first steps towards faith as well.⁵ For Prosper, it was obvious that this same principle was a key issue in the nascent controversy with the Massilians. Because of Augustine's fierce defense of the absolute gratuity of grace in the Pelagian controversy and its association with the aforementioned

3. The tone of the entire letter gives no evidence to support R. Mathisen's statement that Rufinus seems to have been an anti-Augustinian himself. Cf. *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy in Fifth-Century Gaul*, CUA Press (1989), p. 125. For whatever reason and without foundation, Mathisen also lends credibility to the notion that Prosper was "a disenchanted Pelagian." (p. 129).

4. Actually, John Cassian who was perhaps the most able and certainly the most respected spokesman for the Massilians held that the initiative towards a good will, the *initium fidei* belongs to man in some cases as exemplified by Zacchaeus and the Good thief of the gospel. This shall be a fundamental point of contention further elaborated in Prosper's *Contra Collatorem*.

5. *Ad Aug.* 3.

principle, from the very beginning Prosper associates the Massilians' tenets with Pelagianism. This is another sense in which the term semipelagian is not as historically inaccurate as some have asserted.⁶ But on the other hand, one must realize that the term "semipelagian" would have been, in a way, meaningless to Prosper. His main concern at all times was to uphold the absolute gratuity of grace, a point that the Pelagians were unable to concede in their exaltation of human free will. Thus in Prosper's view of the situation one either took a Pelagian or a Catholic stance. There was no semi-position. This view prevails unmitigated throughout Prosper's writings. His method of logical argument is basically to force the opposition to choose between (1) self-contradiction, (2) a position associated with the anathematized Pelagians or (3) a position at odds with the authority of the councils which had condemned Pelagianism, or the authority of the Apostolic See or against Sacred Scripture itself which in fact is referenced over 50 times in this letter alone. Needless to say, these types of arguments were not to be easily accepted by everyone involved, especially by the Massilians who always distanced themselves from Pelagianism and consider themselves to be the standard of orthodoxy.⁷

Nevertheless, after recognizing the shortcomings of Prosper's rhetorical arguments and controversialist style, it would be erroneous to conclude that Prosper held an altogether negative view of the Massilians themselves or that his exposition of the issues distorted the Massilian position

6. For example, P. de Letter, ACW vol. 14, pg. 158, footnote 6.

7. A typical example is the *Commonitorium*, a work which is ascribed to Vincent of Lerins. I have also noted that Cassian severely criticized and equated Nestorius' rejection of the title *Theotokos* with Pelagianism in his treatise *De incarnatione*. The association of Nestorianism and Pelagianism was also made by Prosper in his brief *Epitaphium Nestoriana*.

in any significant manner. Despite some moral outrage at the slanderous opinions which were being spread about Augustine⁸, Prosper acknowledges in general the Massilians' good faith, moral integrity and virtue. He even goes on to express his hope that God's mercy will delay somehow their advance in error since it is because of their very zeal for virtue and the integrity of their lives that they have run into danger.⁹ This is in clear contrast with the Pelagians whom he calls "cunning sons of darkness who wished to be taken for sons of light."¹⁰

8. Prosper intimates that in "many a conference" against Augustine (*Ad Ruf.* 4, PL 51, 80 A: "...inter multas collationes..."), the bishop of Hippo had been slandered as still tainted by Manichean dualism and pagan fatalism. See also Prosper's *Ad Aug.* 3 and his answers to the objections of the Gauls (*Pro Augustino responsiones ad capitula objectionum Gallorum calumniantium* 1).

9. *Ad Rufinum* 4 (PL 51, 80 B): "Ego quidem etiam hoc de divitiis misericordiae Dei spero, quod quos nunc libero falli arbitrio suo, et ab humilitatis via patitur evagari, non usquequaque neque in finem sit intelligentia fraudaturus; sed hunc ipsum in longinquiora progressum, ideo ab eo tardius revocari, ut opus gratiae ejus majore gloria celebretur, cum sibi etiam adversantium corda subdiderit, quibus de virtutum studio exortum est periculum, et de morum probitate discrimen."

10. *Ibid.* (PL 51, 78C): "...filii tenebrarum in similitudinem filiorum lucis transfigurare voluerunt,..."

Despite his insistence that when not entirely ascribing the *initium fidei* to divine grace one would logically end up with Pelagianism, Prosper did not fail to distinguish the essential theological differences between the Massilians and the Pelagians. Augustine himself had written: "Pervenerunt autem isti frates nostri, pro quibus sollicita est pia charitas vestra, ut credant cum Ecclesia Christi, peccato primi hominis obnoxium nasci genus humanum, nec ab isto malo nisi per iustitiam secundi hominis aliquem liberari. Pervenerunt etiam, ut praeveniri voluntates hominum Dei gratia fateantur, atque ad nullum opus bonum vel incipiendum vel perficiendum sibi quemquam sufficere posse consentiant. Retenta ergo ista in quae pervenerunt, plurimum eos a pelagianorum errore discernunt." (*De praed. sanct.* 1, 2). As J. Chéné has pointed out ("Que signifiaient *Initium fidei* et *Affectus Credulitatis* pour les Semipelagiens?" in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 35 (1948): 566-88), Prosper makes a distinction even among the Massilians themselves by discriminating between two groups among them. These two groups are defined following the expressions "multi ergo servorum Christi" (*Ad Aug.* 2 and 3) and "quidam vero horum" (*Ad Aug.* 4f). The former are mainly those who reject some of the Augustinian teachings as innovation and the latter consist of

After the first four sections of this letter to Rufinus which refer to the general situation, Prosper begins a more nuanced discussion of a key issue in the controversy, the *initium fidei*.¹¹ He begins by referring to a large number of texts from Sacred Scripture to refute the claims of the Massilians. However, the Massilians used several of the same texts to bolster their own position. Faced with this situation, Prosper specifies a principle of his exegetical argument which he will use repeatedly, especially later on against Cassian's exegetical methods. This principle states that to prove a proposition one should use texts which cannot be understood both in favor and opposed to that proposition. Moreover, Prosper questions the selective use of Scripture on the part of the Massilians who argue by using Mat 11, 28-30 but avoid Jn 5, 21; 6, 44. 66; 15, 5; Lk 10, 22 and "all other unchangeable texts which cannot be interpreted in a twisted sense."¹² Among the texts used by the Massilians to show what human free will and good desires are able to accomplish is the story of Cornelius in the Acts of the Apostles. But Prosper points out that the entire preparation of Cornelius to receive baptism was in itself a gift of grace. The voice that spoke to Peter ["that which God

those that approach or actually fall into some of the Pelagian errors. As late as 432 Prosper writes: "Quorum intus interstrepens domestica malignitas non minus spernenda esset, quam foris latrans haeretica loquacitas; nisi ejectis extra ovile Dominicum lupis, qui sub nomine ovium sunt suffragarentur, essentque ejusmodi ut nec ordo eorum in Ecclesia nec ingenia despicienda videantur." (*Contra Collatorem* 1, 1) For Prosper, although they may favor the "wolves" which have been "ejected from the Lord's fold," the Massilians were still "of the fold."

11. No doubt the question of predestination and the divine salvific will played important roles in the controversy. But a careful look indicates that the issue of the gratuity of grace and in particular the issue of the beginning of faith was at the foundation of all the problems in the dispute.

12. *Ad Ruf.* 5: "Quae omnia cum sint incommutabilia, et nequeant ulla interpretatione in sensum alium detorqueri,..."

has cleansed, do not call unclean" Acts 10, 15], shows that it was God's grace which had purified Cornelius and had initiated all the good works that preceded his baptism.

In the next four sections Prosper continues to discuss the question of the absolute gratuity of God's gifts which include not only faith but charity, as well as perseverance in virtue, and in fact, free will itself. Once again Prosper relies on Sacred Scripture in his argument linking faith with charity which comes strictly from God. A fundamental Augustinian outlook is at this point expressed by Prosper when he states that while we may be able to perform worthy and admirable deeds, if they are without charity they only resemble holiness.¹³ In arguing that free will can do nothing without grace and in fact it is grace which sets it free¹⁴, Prosper uses the example of Peter, who had made a great promise on his own ["Lord, at your side I am prepared to face imprisonment and death itself" Lk 22, 33] but was first allowed to fall and then later restored to virtue and perseverance less he thought he stood firm in his free will.

Although it is defined in the context of the larger issue of the absolute gratuity of God's grace, the question of predestination is hardly discussed in this letter.¹⁵ In section 11 Prosper mentions one of the reasons that some refuse to admit the absolute gratuity of grace as expressed in the Augustinian

13. Ibid. 8: "Quia scilicet multa laudabilia atque miranda possunt in homine reperiri, quae sine charitatis medullis habent quidem pietatis similitudinem, sed non habent veritatem." Prosper recognized the human ability to do "good" in a natural sense but certainly not in the sense that in and of themselves these works have any salutary value.

14. Ibid. 10: "... quod donec sine Deo solum fuit, mortuum fuit iustitiae, vixitque peccato... ."

15. It is noteworthy that predestination is not discussed directly in Prosper's main work against Cassian.

system; they would be compelled then to admit that the number of the elect according to God's decree is fixed and definite with God. The conclusion that the number of the elect is certain and will neither increased nor decrease had been particularly difficult for many of the monks to accept. Many looked with horror upon this teaching thinking that it would have devastating consequences in the pastoral aspects of exhorting anyone to lead a life of virtue. But this notion of the *numerus clausus* or *numerus certus*, viewed by some as too rigid, was the logical conclusion of a more basic idea; the notion of a divine predilection. This means that in creating the world, God has decided to give grace to each individual as he sees fit. This divine grace leads all the elect -- freely but infallibly in God's creative decision -- to their salvation. In this sense, God "has decided" effectively the number of the elect by this decision.¹⁶ Prosper maintained that only those will be saved who God knows will wish to cooperate with the grace decreed for them. The subtle difference with the Massilian position is easily missed. They taught that only the human free will, by resisting or consenting to grace, decides whether one will be saved or lost. So for instance, in the Massilian view Judas Iscariot in fact "had been" one of the elect before his fall. For Prosper, this view was simply a denial of God's infallible knowledge, who unknown to anyone but himself has by an act of will chosen to create and provide the graces in a

16. Part of the difficulty in discussing predestination and God's foreknowledge (prescience) lies in the fact that we have to speak with the concepts and language of our own finite experience. And of course, we are not justified in assuming that God's experience is in terms of past, present and future. There is no doubt that Augustine was very much aware of the limitations of language but the issue is complicated because at times Augustine seems to speak as if some are actually predestinated to condemnation (not just foreknown to be condemned). Nevertheless, one must be sensitive to the fact that the Augustinian expression in the case of the *numerus certus* does not wish to go beyond asserting the absolute gratuity of grace. This is clear from the context.

world where very definitely God sees Peter repent and Judas despair.¹⁷ Augustine also had written; "Since the Lord raised Lazarus, he no doubt could do it; but since he did not raise Judas, is it reasonable to say he could not do it? He could, but did not wish to."¹⁸ For Augustine, the term "will" referred mostly to "efficacious will" as later theology would specify. As far as the reasons for God's choice, let us note that Prosper, following Augustine, emphasizes the idea of the inscrutability of God's judgments: "O the depth and the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Rom 11, 33).

In section 13 and following Prosper describes in more detail the meaning of the universal salvific will of God for the Massilians. He considers trite the interpretation which the Massilians give to 1 Tim 2, 4. For he asks, are all who died without having known God from ages past till now numbered among "all men" whom God has "willed" to come to the knowledge of truth? Even granting that for adults the evil works they did were the obstacle for their salvation, what difference in merit could there be between infants who are saved and infants who are not? Following Augustine once again, Prosper asserts that if only human merits were considered humanity could actually be justly condemned for in Adam all have sinned.¹⁹

17. The point is that God could have created another world in which Judas would have been converted and Peter would have remained unrepented independently of the merits of Peter and Judas.

18. *De natura et gratia* 7, 8: "Quia enim Dominus Lazarum suscitavit, sine dubio potuit: quia vero ludam non suscitavit, numquid dicendum est: 'Non potuit?' Potuit ergo, sed noluit."

19. *Ad Ruf.* 13 (PL 51, 85 B): "Si meritum consideres, non una pars salvari meruit, sed utraque damnari; quia omnibus in Adae praevacatione prostratis, nisi quosdam assumeret misericors gratia, maneret super universos inculcata iustitia." The presupposition is that not all are saved.

In the last two sections Prosper recapitulates his answer to the objections that God's grace leaves nothing to human free will. It is true, he says, that in the case of infants there is apparently no act nor desire of the will. And those who have deathbed conversions are saved through baptism at their last breath as it were. But with the eyes of faith, he adds, we can see that when left unaided free will in fact acts to its own perdition but when graced the same free will is turned to God and not destroyed. In the epilogue, Prosper once again alludes to and then dismisses as statements without foundation certain charges raised against Augustine; that in fact, the bishop of Hippo teaches fatalism or that perhaps he is still affected by the Manichean dualism which he dabbled with in his youth and thus feels the need to divide humanity into the elect and the reprobate.

2.2 AD AUGUSTINUM

This second letter of Prosper, in style, in purpose and even in length, is substantially different from the first one. From the preface of the letter we learn that this was not Prosper's first letter to Augustine. He had written to him previously and had obtained an answer from Augustine through a deacon by the name of Leontius. Unfortunately, both the letter and the reply have been lost in history.

In this letter to Augustine, Prosper summarizes the main tenets of the Massilians. First of all, they did believe that all had sinned in Adam and that regeneration can come only through God's grace. They also believed that grace is offered indiscriminately to all and thus anyone willing to approach faith and baptism could be saved. So in a sense we "predestine" ourselves. Moreover, God had foreseen from all eternity the merits of those who would believe and whose faith would then be assisted by grace, a reward for their

willingness. Consequently, the objections described by Prosper which the Massilians raise against Augustine's teachings fall basically into two categories: (1) objections against the Augustinian view of the universal salvific will of God which the Massilians viewed as too restrictive. (2) objections against the Augustinian teaching on divine election and predestination which the Massilian viewed as an innovation or worse (e.g., fatalism or Manichean dualism). In fact, for the Massilians predestination meant little more than God's foreknowledge of human merit. Thus, for instance, they held that a dying infant was saved by the grace of baptism simply because God foreknew the merits of the child if that child had lived to a more mature age. Such a view could not possibly be correct, Prosper argued, since it is meaningless to say that God "foreknows" what will never be. However, the objections related to the Augustinian exposition of the divine salvific will were more substantial. Furthermore, it seems that Prosper was either unwilling or perhaps not completely able at this stage to provide a clear alternative to certain elements in the Massilian position.

Prosper also summarized in the form of several requests his reasons for writing to Augustine. The first request to the bishop of Hippo was for Augustine to show that a point of faith was indeed at stake in the matter of attributing the beginning of salvation to the human will. Once this was established, the second request was to show how the human free will is not hindered by divine grace which precedes and cooperates with it. The third request was on the issue of predestination itself and its relationship to God's foreknowledge and God's decree (*divinum propositum*).

These requests and the form which they take in the letter are indications that Prosper turned to Augustine not only because of the weight of the bishop's authority but also from a genuine need for clarifications at a

personal level. I speculate that Prosper did not feel yet at home with all the Augustinian system. In reality, there is no reason why we should assume that Prosper did at this early stage. Also, Prosper seems personally impressed by several of the Massilians some of whom are "renowned for the sanctity of their lives and the dignity of their rank."²⁰

2.3 CARMEN DE INGRATIS

Augustine did have time to comply with the requests of Prosper and his associate Hilarius and shortly before his death in 430, he composed the books known to us as the *De praedestinatione sanctorum* and the *De dono perseverantiae* but originally appeared as one bipartite work.²¹ Prosper himself did not wait idly for the Augustinian reply. He composed the *Carmen de ingratis* or ΠΕΡΙ ΑΧΑΡΙΣΤΟΝ which is essentially a poetic version of the two Prosperian letters previously discussed. This unique work must have been composed sometime after 428 and before 431.²²

The poem consists of 1002 hexameters (plus a preface and an introduction of ten and eleven lines respectively) in which Prosper

20. *Ad Aug.* 9. Prosper mentions by name, Hilarius (not his layman associate but the bishop of Arles) whom he describes as an saintly admirer and follower of Augustine in all other points of his doctrine ("Hilarium Arelatensem episcopum, sciat beatitudo tua admiratorem sectatoremque in aliis omnibus tuae esse doctrinae.")

21. *Ad excerpta Genuensium* (PL 51, 187 A): "In libris beatae memoriae Augustini episcopi, quorum titulus est *de Praedestinatione Sanctorum*,..."

22. This is deduced from the fact that in the poem itself there is no reference to Ephesus (431) when Prosper recalls the authorities condemning Pelagianism. But in his *Contra Collatorem* 21, 2 (PL 51, 271 C), we find the following: "... quando Cyrillo Alexandrinae urbi antistiti, gloriosissimo fidei catholicae defensori ad exsecandam Nestorianam impietatem, apostolico auxiliatus est gladio; quo etiam Pelagiani, dum cognatis confoederantur erroribus, iterum prosternerentur."

summarizes the Pelagian teachings and the history of that controversy (verse 1 to verse 113). He shows why Pelagianism is logically a parent to the teachings of the Massilians (114-225) and then proceeds to summarize and refute their two main tenets, namely that faith and good desires may be initiated solely from our free will and that God wills the salvation of all in the sense that he predestines everyone equally to salvation and gives to all equal grace (226-564). He further reviews the arguments of the Massilians, concentrating in refuting their examples (565-800) and concludes by associating once again Pelagianism with the Massilian position (801-1002).

The *Carmen de ingratis* is a passionate and unique piece of poetry. It is certainly more polemical in tone than any other work in the Prosperian corpus. Not surprisingly, even a careful reading of this poem does not seem to yield anything new or different from the positions Prosper has already espoused in his previous two letters. The *Carmen* does not contribute any new arguments to his prosaic works nor is there any evidence of a development in thought. It seems that the poem was written with the Pelagians as well as the Massilians in mind. Its purpose may have been simply to show, in the unique style of poetry, their close ties rather than to deal with new questions and developments.

2.4 RESPONSES TO THE EXCERPTS OF THE GENOESE

From the books *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* and *De dono perseverantiae*, two priests from Genoa²³ extracted several passages which they found to be either novel or not very clear. They sent them to Prosper for

23. The priests were Camillus and Theodorus, from Genoa, although an alternative reading of "Genuensium" as "Agnuensium" would make them natives of Agen. This has been proposed by G. de Plinval, "Prosper d'Aquitaine: interprète de saint Augustin" *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958): 339-55.

further clarification, something which seemed the natural thing to do perhaps since the books had been addressed to Prosper (and Hilarius) and Augustine had already died by this time. There were a total of ten excerpts, the first seven from *De praedestinatione sanctorum*. Prosper answers the first three excerpts together (taken from DPS 1, 3) beginning once again with a brief description of how Augustine initially had thought that the reason for God electing one for grace and not electing another (as exemplified in the case of twins such as Jacob and Esau) must have been simply his foreknowledge of the merits of one and the demerits of the other. After concisely but clearly examining the Pelagian concept of grace and its proximity with such an opinion, Prosper exhorts the priests to see the unreasonableness of anyone preferring Augustine's imperfect knowledge as a young man to his mature understanding.²⁴ In this answer, it should be noted how Prosper's notion of grace is based on humanity's fallen state and the healing character of grace, two fundamental notions in the Augustinian theology of grace.

The next two excerpts are extremely short and deal with God's preparation of the will of the elect from the beginning of faith until final perseverance. Behind the requested clarification for these excerpts there is, no doubt, the veiled but understandable desire of the inquiring priests to make the reality of the Augustinian teaching on divine election sound less rigid. For if God prepares in the elect the will to believe so that faith both from the beginning and in its fulfillment is a gift, the natural human question is why is this gift not given to all? Prosper's answer, which in fact he continues in the response to excerpt 6, is essentially this: the reason that this gift is not given

24. As noted, Augustine's earlier views were used sometimes against him by some of his detractors.

to all is hidden in the mystery of God himself.²⁵ With the eyes of faith, Prosper adds, if a gift is apparently not given to all it should not disturb any of the faithful as if our knowledge of God, who does not will what is unjust, should not be limited by our very human nature. Prosper's attitude is once again quite similar to Augustine's own. Their keen, inquisitive minds did not forget to accept and even sensed whenever they approached the threshold of a mystery of faith.

Excerpt 7 is not in the line of thought of the previous ones. In fact, it belongs to a much later chapter in the Augustinian work from where it is taken (*De praed. sanct.*, 16, 33). Prosper states that in context the excerpt is so obvious that he wonders why the two consultants extracted it. The excerpt deals with God's providence and the fact that humans have the power to sin but even the effects of human sinful actions are used to achieve God's own designs and divine purpose. Prosper emphasizes that just because God makes use of the "darkness" (*tenebras*) it does not mean that the darkness is without guilt nor does it mean that God is the author of that darkness.

The last two excerpts are from *De dono perseverantiae* (14, 35f and 15, 38). Actually, there was a third excerpt which is omitted by Prosper who says it should have been joined more properly to excerpt 8 and accordingly he answers them as if they had been one. Excerpt 8 is interesting on two accounts. First of all, it provides us with Augustine's precise definition of predestination: it is the divine foreknowledge and preparation of the gifts by which God saves infallibly all those that are in fact saved. Secondly, the

25. The position runs the risk of being disparaged as "fideism" or "agnosticism" by a more rationalist outlook. Cf. P. De Letter's translation of *De vocatione omnium gentium*, Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 14 (1952), footnotes 76 and 181. But in reality it is an integral aspect of Prosper's theology of grace without which it cannot be understood.

excerpt from Augustine contains the gospel passage where the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida are upbraided by Christ for their ingratitude (Matt 11, 21). Prosper's answer does not attempt to systematize. What else can be said besides that cities (such as Sidon and Tyre) were not given to have faith and that the gospel states that they would have believed if they had seen Christ's miracles? We simply cannot fathom why the Lord worked miracles for people in Bethsaida and Chorazin (who apparently did not profit by them) but did not work them for others in Sidon and Tyre (who apparently would have profited by them according to his own testimony in the gospel!).

Excerpt 9 is a parody of what an Augustinian sermon on predestination would be like. It deals with the often repeated accusation that the Augustinian teachings renders any exhortation to the practice of Christian virtue useless. This excerpt also deals with the issue of the wisdom in preaching predestination to the ordinary Christian for the same practical reasons, even assuming that the Augustinian teaching were true. Following Augustine, Prosper considers that it is necessary to preach to the Church both about predestination which is the preparation of grace and about grace which is the effect of predestination and the prescience of God who knows from all eternity how he would bestow this grace. Prosper adds without ambiguity that anyone opposed to the preaching of this doctrine is simply giving support to the Pelagian heresy or at least helping to exalt their views.²⁶

26. *Ad exc. Gen.* (PL 51, 200 D): "Cujus praedicationis quisquis est impugnator, apertissimus est Pelagianae elationis adjutor."

Despite the separation of twelve centuries, it is interesting to compare this attitude with the opinion that St. Ignatius of Loyola gives for his era in his *Spiritual Exercises*, rules 14 and 15. He writes, "Dado que sea mucha verdad que ninguno se puede salvar sin ser predestinado y sin tener fe y gracia, es mucho de advertir en el modo de hablar y comunicar de todas ellas." Loyola continues, "No debemos hablar mucho de la predestinación por vía de costumbre; mas si en alguna manera y algunas veces se hablare, así se hable que el pueblo menudo no venga en error alguno, como algunas veces suele, diciendo: Si tengo de

2.5 RESPONSES TO THE OBJECTIONS OF THE GAULS

After Augustine's death, Prosper entered into some sort of pamphlet duel with the more anti-Augustinian faction in Southern France. The *Pro Augustino responsiones ad capitula obiectionum Gallorum calumniantium* is one of two surviving testimonies of that extreme polemic, although the text of the Gallic objections itself is known to us only by Prosper's responses.

The most obvious structural division of this work is that it consists of two parts. The first part deals with fifteen articles or *capitula* each supposedly an Augustinian doctrine or a logical consequence thereof, followed by Prosper's corresponding response. In the second part, Prosper summarizes each response with a *sententia* or qualification for each article in less ambiguous language.²⁷

Prosper's intention is clearly stated in the preface. By following faithfully the points of doctrine which Augustine has expounded on grace, Prosper wishes to show even a hurried reader that his detractors are totally unjust.²⁸ Despite the polemical character of the work, it is extremely useful in

ser salvo o condenado, ya está determinado, y por mi bien hacer o mal, no puede ser ya otra cosa; y con esto entorpeciendo se descuidan en las obras que conducen a la salud y provecho espiritual de sus ánimas." Ejercicios Espirituales, BAC vol. 245 (edición bilingüe), with commentary by Luis Gonzalez, S. I. and Ignacio Iparraguirre, S. I., pp. 127-28.

27. *Resp. ad Gall.* (PL 51, 169 D): "Quamvis ergo ad omnes obiectiones seu querulae imperitiae, seu fallacis invidiae, planissime ac plenissime, quantum Dominus dedit, existimem esse responsum, professionem tamen sensus nostri etiam in brevia coarctemus; ut sub paucorum verborum simplicitate magis magisque appareat nos quod de supra scriptis capitulis intelligimus, nulla circumloquendi arte praetexere, sed absolute ac libere et prava respuere, et consensum probabilibus non negare."

28. *Ibid.* (PL 51, 156-57 A): "...in nullo recedens a tramite earum definitionum quae in sancti viri disputationibus continentur; ut facile vel tenuis diligentiae advertat inspector, quam injustis opprobriis catholici praedicatoris memoria carpatur..."

attempting to reconstruct the undergirding structure in Prosper's theology of grace.

The first article of the Gauls refers to the charge that Augustine's teaching on predestination promotes fatalism and in fact, by predestination some would be necessarily compelled to sin. As I have noted, this charge of fatalism is recurrent in the controversy and was commented upon by Prosper in both of his letters and even by Augustine in his *Contra duas epist. Pel.*, II; 5, 9. The doctrine of original sin, not directly addressed in much of the controversy, enters into Prosper's answer when he explains that the objection is a total distortion of the Augustinian teaching on predestination and that the propensity to evil does not come from God's creation but from the sin of our first parents.

The second article is another distortion which states that in the non-elect, original sin is not cleansed by the sacrament of baptism. Somewhat inconsistently, the third article states that baptism is of no use to the non-elect, not because of its failure to cleanse them from original sin, but because of its ultimate ineffectiveness since in fact, God allows these people (the non-elect) to live until they fall into mortal sin and then -- and only then -- does God take them out of this world to perish eternally. Some have claimed that Prosper in this answer teaches a predestination *post previsa demerita* which goes explicitly beyond Augustine.²⁹ There is little doubt that part of this claim is accurate since Prosper clearly writes, "It is not God who forsook them that they should forsake him; it is they who forsook him and then were

29. Cf. P. De Letter, ACW, vol 14, p. 223, footnote 11.

forsaken."³⁰ But as far as going explicitly beyond Augustine, one would do well to recall -- among several other texts to the same effect -- Augustine's answer to Felix the Manichean. Despite his much maligned *massa damnata* outlook of humanity, Augustine's answer is noteworthy. To Augustine's remarks that the god of the Manicheans seemed cruel, Felix had replied that Christ seemed just as cruel since he allowed many to be condemned. Augustine replied that those that perished had not been saved because in fact they did not will it. Apparently Felix could not believe his ears! "Because they did not will it, is this what you said?!" to which Augustine replied: "I said it, because they did not will it."³¹ In other words, Augustine in this dialogue teaches implicitly a reprobation depending on personal demerits. After all, Augustine never said that because of original sin we should have all been condemned, but only that we could have been, especially if the only thing that counted were our merits.

The fourth article states simply that "not all men are called to grace." Prosper answers that this is not a correct way of speaking even though some to whom the gospel has been announced do not obey the call. In other words, they have not been called to, using an anachronistic term, efficacious

30. *Ad excerpta Gen.* 3 (PL 51, 159 B): "Non enim relictus est a Deo, ut relinqueret Deum: sed reliquerunt, et relictus est, et ex bono in malum propria voluntate mutatus est."

31. *Contra Felicem* II, 8 (CSEL 25, 835):

Fel. dixit: Crudelem adseritis Manichaeum haec dicentem; de Christo quid dicimus, qui dixit: ite in ignem aeternum?

Aug. dixit: Peccatoribus hoc dixit.

Fel. dixit: Isti peccatores quare non purgati sunt?

Aug. dixit: Quia noluerunt.

Fel. dixit: Quia noluerunt, hoc dixisti?

Aug. dixit: Hoc dixi, quia noluerunt..

Similarly in *De natura et gratia* 26, 29 Augustine writes that God "non deserit si non deseratur."

grace. The statement in the article is true, Prosper adds, only if "all men" includes those to whom the gospel has not yet been announced and only if by grace one means the hearing of the gospel. Article 5 is related to the very same question and once again Prosper differentiates between "call" and "grace".

Article 6 is the objection that predestination destroys the human free will. Thus the reprobate are not able to do good, while the elect are compelled to it. This objection is interesting from the point of view that it assumes the Pelagian view of human free will, that is, the ability to choose equally between evil and good. Obviously, this could not be further from any Augustinian presuppositions.

In article 7 we seem to encounter once again the teaching of reprobation *post praevisa demerita*. In particular, the grace of final perseverance is denied to some not because God did not set them apart from the reprobate but they were reprobated in God's foreknowledge of their demerits. Notice the subtle difference between this statement about reprobation and the statement that God's foreknowledge of human merits positively does not enter into the process of divine election.

Article 8 is perhaps the only objection which is validly based on the Augustinian system. Perhaps this is the reason why Prosper's answer is longer than any other in this work. The article simply states that God does not will all to be saved except those he has predestined. Obviously, we should distinguish among the different possible meanings of the word "will" in Augustine's writings (I shall return to this point in the next chapter).

We should also note that in Prosper's response the two themes which are recurrent in his arguments associated to the divine salvific will. First of all, the why of it all is not possible for us to understand and in fact it is dangerous

inquisitiveness to try to decipher it. Secondly, the absence of a free act of will in the case of baptized dying infants helps to illustrate as clearly as it could be illustrated that human free will cannot be considered the determining factor in God's choice of the elect. However, Prosper does not deny, as we have seen in articles 2 and 7, that human free will is instrumental in determining reprobation.³² Moreover, Prosper clearly states that God takes care of all and that there is no one that either by the preaching of the gospel or the Law or the dictates of human conscience does not receive God's call.³³ He makes clear however that we should not understand the statement that all gifts come from God in the sense that they were given to us in our very creation by the Author of our nature.³⁴ This shows that Prosper maintained a distinction on something modern theology claims to have "rediscovered" about Pelagius. In other words, Prosper knew the distinction between denying "grace" *a priori* and shifting categories to mean by "grace" simply "nature" or "free will" as Pelagius had done.

In article 8 we also find another important element in Prosper's theology of grace; namely, the Augustinian idea of grace as healing grace. Prosper writes that even though in the beginning humanity had the power of knowing and doing what is right, we lost it "in quo omnes peccavimus." Accordingly, we are in need of being renewed in Christ, "in quo sumus nova creatura."

32. Cf. also *De vocatione omnium gentium* 1, 13; 1, 21; 2, 9.

33. *Ad capitula Gall.* (PL 51, 164 B): "Omnium ergo hominum cura est Deo: et nemo est quem non aut evangelica praedicatio, aut legis testificatio, aut ipsa etiam natura conveniat."

34. *Ibid.*: "Neque haec dona ita ex Deo esse opinemur, ut quia ipse naturae nostrae auctor est, per conditionem iam haec contulisse videatur."

Article 9 states that the Augustinian doctrine denies that Christ dies for the redemption of all. This same objection will be seen next in the Vincentian articles. Prosper's answer is basic. There is a distinction between redemption in the sense that Christ did die on the cross for the benefit of all and redemption in the sense that not all profit from his sacrifice. Obviously in the former case redemption is absolutely universal and in the latter case it is not.

Article 10 is yet another crude distortion of an Augustinian teaching. It states that the Lord withholds from some people the gospel message so that they are not saved. The answer given once again points out that the question as to why the gospel has been preached to some nations or individuals and not others transcends our understanding of God.

Article 11 is a rehash of article 1 while in article 12 we find a basic misunderstanding clearly explained. It is the equating of predestination with God's foreknowledge.³⁵ Although God foreknows the good as well as the evil, he only wills the good. What is evil he neither wills nor in any way he inspires or compels humans to do. In articles 14 and 15 Prosper comes back

35. When Augustine considers predestination connected with God's foreknowledge, he means the foreknowledge of gifts. This is totally different from the foreknowledge of merits. It is only God's foreknowledge of gifts (not of merits) which directs and assures God's desired results of predestination. Thomas Smith in his Ph. D. dissertation (Notre Dame 1989, preprint, p. 87) does not carefully distinguish that and ascribes to Augustine a confusion that is not there. Smith writes; "The root of the problem of those who misunderstand divine foreknowledge is their failure to distinguish between foreknowledge and predestination. One might point out here that those who make such an equation do so with good Augustinian precedent, but in II.3 (of the *De gratia*) Faustus argues precisely that the two are not to be seen as equivalent."

Prosper is so clearly aware of this difference that this is one of his main criticisms of the Massilians' understanding of the universal salvific will as we also saw in our discussion of his letters. Furthermore, it is simply not possible to hold that Augustine was not also well aware of this distinction if we realize that he actually differentiates between foreknowledge of merits and divine gifts.

to the same point presenting an additional way of maintaining the proper difference: foreknowledge can exist without predestination but predestination cannot exist without foreknowledge.

Finally, article 13 is the idea that even the non-elect serve a temporal purpose in God's providential design (cf. extract 7 of the Genoese excerpts) twisted to mean that the non-elect were selected for condemnation from the beginning of creation.

2.6 RESPONSES TO THE VINCENTIAN ARTICLES

The sixteen Vincentian articles, also unknown except by Prosper's text, appear to have been even more violent and crude in tone than the previously discussed articles of the Gauls. They were without doubt distortions of the Augustinian teachings with the definite purpose of trying to discredit them. Understandably, Prosper's answer, the *Pro Augustino responsiones ad capitula obiectionum Vincentianarum*, is the shortest of his works associated to the controversy after Augustine's death.

Among other things, according to these sixteen articles Augustine supposedly taught that Christ did not die for all humanity (1) and that God does not want the salvation of all (2, 7, 8 and 9). As a matter of fact, he created the greater part of humanity for its own damnation (3 and 4) refusing to consider the free will of those eventually reprobated (6). Therefore, God himself has to be considered the author of sin, even the most hideous crimes of adulteries, violations of consecrated virgins (10) and incests (11). By predestination, God denies the means of repentance and salvation to a vast number of people turning them into "sons of the devil" (12, 13, 14 and 15). The irony of ironies is that, without knowing, the non-elect ask for their own damnation in the Lord's prayer when they say, "Thy will be done" (16).

Prosper's description of this pamphlet as a "diabolical catalog" containing the "most blasphemous falsehoods"³⁶ is rhetorical but understandable. However, there are some things which could be extracted from this work to contribute towards a positive construction of Prosper's theology of grace. In Prosper's answer to article 2, we find perhaps the clearest statement summarizing Prosper's position on the divine salvific will. He writes:

"Truth itself says: If you who are evil, give good things to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask? (Mat 7, 11). How could it be that God, who saves those of whom it cannot be said that they wish to be saved, does not save some others who wish to be saved, unless for some reason, hidden to us but well judged by him of whom it cannot be said he had to do anything in any other way than he actually did? Thus, staying away from the reasons for which divine knowledge keeps the secrets of his justice hidden, it is most sincerely to be believed and professed that God wills the salvation of all; since the apostle, whose sentence this is, insists on that command most piously observed in all churches that prayers be offered to God for all. Of those, if many perish, they perish because of their fault. If many are saved, they are saved by a gift. When a sinner (*reus*) is condemned, it is through God's blameless justice. But if a sinner is justified, it is through God's ineffable gift of grace."³⁷

36. *Ad cap. object. Vinc.* (PL 51, 177 A): "...blasphemiaram prodigiosa mendacia;...esse qualia diabolico continentur indiculo."

37. *Ad cap. object. Vinc.* (PL 51, 179 B and C): "Cum veritas dicat: Si vos cum sitis mali, nostis bona data dare filiis vestris, quanto magis Pater vester coelestis dabit bona petentibus se? (Mat 7, 11). Qui fieri potest ut Deus, qui etiam illos salvat, de quibus dici non potest quod salvari velint, nolit aliquos salvare etiam si salvari velint, nisi aliquae causae exsistant de quibus, quamvis sint nobis ingnoscibiles, ille tamen ben judicat, de quo dici non potest, aliter eum quidquam facere debuisse quam fecerit? Remota ergo hac discretione, quam divina scientia intra secretum justitiae suae continet, sincerissime credendum atque profitendum est Deum velle ut omnes homines salvi fiant. Siquidem Apostolus, cujus ista sententia est sollicitissime praecipit, quod omnibus Ecclesiis piissime custoditur, ut Deo pro omnibus hominibus supplicetur: ex quibus quod multi pereunt, pereuntium est meritum; quod multi salvantur, salvantis est donum. Ut enim reus damnetur, inculpabilis Dei justitia est; ut autem reus justificetur, ineffabilis Dei gratia est."

Note once again the statement on reprobation which is decided taking into consideration our demerits. Also note the recurrent themes of 1) the absolute gratuity of God's gift of election (in other words, without consideration of merits), and 2) the inscrutability and justice of God's decisions.

The other point of interest which comes up in Prosper's answer to article 5 is the language Prosper uses to answer the accusation that God is the author of our sins. The charge, he says, comes from the same source which affirms that human nature is free from Adam's sin and remained unharmed. But in fact, Prosper proceeds, we only admit God as the creator of our nature not of sin. Human nature had in its power to sin; and it did sin, freely, and because of it, human nature became enslaved. This is the language of Augustine who sometimes is misunderstood as denying human free will when he says that in sinning we lost our freedom which cannot be recovered except through Christ the savior. The point is that from the context of Prosper's explanation, "freedom" obviously does not refer to "free will". It refers to freedom from sin, the ultimate freedom according to Augustine.

2.7 CONTRA COLLATOREM

This is Prosper's longest work in the controversy with the Massilians. It was written around 432 judging from some internal evidence ³⁸ and it could be considered his mature thought on several of the theological issues

38. Augustine's first writing against the Pelagians is dated around 412. In the first chapter of the *Contra Collatorem* Prosper writes, "Viginti et eo amplius anni sunt, quod contra inimicos gratiae Dei catholica acies, hujus viri ductu pugnat et vincit." Therefore, we can calculate that the time of composition should be roughly $412 + 20 = 432$. Also, from Prosper's words ("..., confidimus Domini protectione praestadium, ut quod operatus est in Innocentio, Zosimo, Bonifacio, Coelestino, operetur in Sixto..." PL 51, 275 C) we can infer that Sixtus III (432-440) had not been pope for long.

involved. The book consists of 22 chapters, one of which (chapter 19) summarily extracts 12 propositions from Cassian's *XIII Conference* as examples of his opinions. Only the first proposition is considered by Prosper to be a true Catholic position.

The *Contra Collatorem* of Prosper is not, and does not pretend to be, a systematic theological presentation although it attempts to be a methodical, step by step look at Cassian's own work. There is no evident structural logic to the book besides the fact that Prosper seems to return time and time again to a central theme: Cassian's inconsistency. It is noteworthy that in the *XIII Conference* Cassian does not deal directly with issues such as predestination. And in fact neither does Prosper in the *Contra Collatorem*. He concentrates on only one issue for the greater part of the book; the question of the *initium fidei*. There is no mention of the word "predestination" and whenever any other disputed point is discussed, it is always within the context of the fundamental issue of the absolute gratuity of divine grace. This fact highlights two things. First of all, it shows that Prosper does make an honest attempt to follow Cassian's own agenda and tries to take him at his printed word without significant distortions in the theological aspects of the dispute.³⁹ Secondly, it further illustrates how the understanding of the *initium fidei* is the key issue in the entire dispute. At least this seems to be so in the case with Cassian, the ablest and most nuanced thinker among the Massilians

In Chapter 1 of the *Contra Collatorem* we find many the general complaints which Prosper has towards the Massilians (he is not addressing Cassian at this stage yet). He defends Augustine as always, exaggerating

39. However, I do not deny that in his rhetorical style perhaps Prosper sometimes magnifies and ascribes to Cassian some opinions on the fall and original sin which do not necessarily follow from Cassian's written word.

perhaps the magnitude of their attack against his venerated teacher. But in chapter 2, he quickly gets very specific. Quite unambiguously he states that he will limit himself to the statements of one author more competent than the others in his knowledge of Sacred Scripture. Then, without ever mentioning Cassian's name, he lets his readers know explicitly that he is referring to the author of the *Collationes XIII* (*De protectione Dei*). He tells us that he has chosen this author over all the others for the definiteness of his statements.

Prosper begins by noting that during the first few chapters of the *XIII Conference* Cassian teaches in a way that would deserve praise, did it not later fall in error and slowly stray from its initial correctness.⁴⁰ For after a discussion on why without God's help not only perfect chastity -- the main topic of the conference -- but all good of every kind cannot be performed, Cassian unambiguously writes:

"We can clearly infer from this that the initiative not only of our actions but also of good thoughts comes from God, who inspires us with a good will to begin with, and supplies us with the opportunity of carrying out what we rightly desire. For every good gift comes down from above, for the Father of lights (James 1, 17), who both begins what is good and continues it and completes it in us. As the Apostle says., 'But he who gives seed to the sower will both provide bread to eat and will multiply your seed and make fruits of your righteousness to increase.' (2 Cor 9, 10).⁴¹

As a matter of fact, for the first six (short) chapters of the *XIII Conference* Cassian uses several other examples and words to the same effect. But by chapter 7 we begin to notice a shift in emphasis. Cassian

40. *Contra Collatorem* 2, 2, (PL 51, 218 B): "...et justo honorari praeconio mereretur, nisi praecipiti laeoque progressu, ab inchoata rectitudine deviaret."

41. *Collationes XIII*, 3, 5. Translation from volume 11 of the series *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

intends to show that the grace of Christ is universal and does not pass anyone by. At one point he writes:

"And when God sees in us some beginnings of a good will, he at once enlightens it and strengthens it and urges it on towards salvation, increasing that which he himself implanted or which he sees to have arisen from our own efforts."⁴²

By now Cassian's idea seems clearly to be that good efforts may come from the unaided human free will. But Prosper gives it a "charitable" interpretation since Cassian indeed could be speaking of the origin of the good will. In other words, Cassian could be understood as saying that it is from the hearts already enlightened by faith that these good efforts proceed.

But in chapter 9 Cassian clearly establishes a distinction which Prosper throughout his book will highlight by placing it opposite to Cassian's initial assertion. Cassian's distinction consists in the way that grace (in the sense of divine calling) is dispensed by God. That is, it seemed obviously to Cassian that some were called willingly while others unwillingly. Some seem to come to grace of their own accord (like Zacchaeus and the good thief of the gospel) while others like Paul and Matthew receive grace even while they are apparently not amenable to it. Prosper rejects this distinction which is based on the method of exegesis of Cassian who collects a number of texts from Sacred Scripture which appear mutually contradictory. Cassian creates sort of a stand off between the gifts of God's grace and the efforts of human activity. So for example, he uses Romans 7, 18 "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it." vis-a-vis Philippians 2, 13, "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Prosper counters by saying that St. Paul did not

42. Ibid. 8, 4.

contradict himself for in one case (in Romans) he simply speaks as one already called and given grace (thus of course, he can will what is right). By this method of exegesis of text and counter text Cassian is not successful in trying, on the one hand, to reject Pelagianism (which denied the absolute gratuity of grace) and on the other hand to attribute sometimes the beginning of faith to the unaided human free will. Moreover, he seems to think that this dilemma is not soluble and only by keeping both alternatives open is error avoided. Cassian's distinction of Christ as saviour of some and refuge of others accentuates this fundamental view. Thus Prosper's judgment that Cassian is inconsistent seems well based to me. One cannot hold to the necessity and the nonnecessity of divine grace for the beginning of faith as Cassian's statements seem to imply that he does.

At this point of the discussion Prosper introduces what appears to be a foreign element into the argument. But in reality Prosper just alludes somewhat obliquely to a teaching from another of Cassian's conferences (*Collationes XVII*).⁴³ Once again, the point that Prosper wants to make is that Cassian's argument and method places in him -- whether he wants to or not -- in the position of trying to keep two opposing alternatives in order to avoid error. As a matter of fact Cassian writes:

"Does God have compassion upon us because we have shown the beginning of a good will or does the beginning of a good will follow

43. Cassian taught in *Collationes XVII*, 20 that even the Apostles thought that a lie was sometimes useful and the truth injurious. He gives the examples of James who urged Paul to condescend to a fictitious arrangement for people who insisted on certain rites of purification according to the law. He adds that Paul "became all things to all men so that he might save all." In this context Cassian speaks of a useful and salutary hypocrisy ("utilis ac salubris hypocrisis"). Not only this, but Cassian gives other examples where telling the truth was actually the cause of deception as in the case of Samson who told Delilah the truth about the source of his strength. Cassian's point is ambiguous at best and utilitarian at worst.

because God has had compassion upon us? Many believing each of these and asserting them more widely than is right are entangled in all kinds of opposed errors."⁴⁴

For the next three chapters Prosper accumulates argument upon argument from authority, by citing many of the pronouncements of the Apostolic See and the councils against the Pelagians. Of course, the connection between Cassian and the Pelagians must be established for the validity of such arguments and it must be admitted that these arguments do not apply well against the person of Cassian. By this time it seems that Prosper can do little more than to refer continuously to Cassian's inconsistency and try to place the last statements of the famous abbot at odds with his first, uncontested one.

In chapter 7 Prosper's turns to a more serene spiritual exegetical argument. Reflecting on John 6, 44 ("No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him") together with several other texts, he shows how people are in fact drawn to God in a variety of ways, for example, by contemplation of the beauty of creation, by hearing of past events, by fear, by joy, by inner desire or by delight in God.⁴⁵ But this variety does not contradict that it is God who works all in all (1 Cor 12, 3) so not even in the case of the good thief, where no indication that grace was at work in him was apparent, are we correct in concluding that one section of humanity comes to God by the sole prompting of their own will, while the other section is drawn in spite of their reluctance and even compelled against their will (as Cassian

44. *Collationes XIII*, 11, 1.

45. For example, Rom 1, 20 (contemplation of the order and beauty of creation); Ps 78, 4 (mighty deeds of God in past events); Prov 1, 7 (fear of God, the beginning of wisdom); Ps 122, 1 (joy); Ps 84, 3 (longing or desire of God); Ps 119, 103 (delight in God).

implies about St. Paul). Cassian had clearly argued that it is grace which is operative in Paul and Matthew while it is free will that is operative in Zacchaeus and the good thief. Prosper's criticism is that in reality this view, as stated, did away with free will in the former and with grace in the latter case.

In the next chapters, Prosper discusses several of Cassian's statements which appear to him to be much too optimistic about the soundness of the human free will after the fall. In reality, Cassian's words about human "goodness" after the fall are indeed ambiguous but Prosper's style of arguing probably magnifies them. However, this need not be taken as deliberate on his part, since in general Prosper's view of grace (like Augustine's) considers "good" only in the salvific sense. To crown this discussion, Prosper considers the following statement of Cassian: "We must take care not to refer all the merits of the saints to the Lord in such a way as to ascribe nothing but what is evil and perverse to human nature."⁴⁶ This statement could be understood in the sense that human free will positively cooperates with grace, but Prosper interprets it in an altogether Pelagian sense and ascribes to Cassian perhaps more than what would necessarily follow from Cassian's written word. Once again, whether this is justified or not is debatable. However, at the beginning of chapter 12 Prosper himself seems to sense this lack of necessity and apologetically writes: "But lest one think that we act on suspicion and pry into the hidden intentions of the author beyond what his words say, let us see whether his further text adds anything

46. *Collationes XIII*, 12, 5.

new to what we know already."⁴⁷ He then proceeds to give an insightful spiritual exegesis of 1 Kings 8, 17ff related to a sophism found in Cassian's text which could be summarized as follows: What shall we say of David's intention to construct the temple? That it was good and came from God or that it was evil and came from himself? If it was good and came from God, why did he who inspired it not allow it to be carried out? If it was evil and came from man (David), why did God praise it? Therefore it must be good and come from man.

Prosper's answer is right on target. First of all, we need not conclude that the inspiration was not from God for the sole reason that God wished Solomon, the son of David, to build the temple instead. We have many examples in which God does not efficaciously will the good intentions which are conceived by his inspiration.⁴⁸ Furthermore, it was in fact under the inspiration of God that the first temple was constructed not by David but by the son of David in order to better prefigure the temple that was prepared in Christ, son of God and son of David.⁴⁹

In the next chapters (13 through 17) Prosper deals with the consequences of another ambiguous statement made by Cassian in chapter 12 of the *XIII Conference*. Here Cassian speaks about the "seeds of virtue" (*virtutum semina*) which, according to him, we may not doubt every soul

47. *Contra Collatorem* 12, 1 (PL 51, 243 D): "Sed ne suspicionibus agere videamur, et latebras sensuum ultra verba rimari, quid aderescat cognitis, doceant quae sequuntur."

48. For example, the inspiration from Matt 28, 19-20 to preach the gospel through all the world and the restriction of Acts 16, 6f. Or the many prayers (for the conversion of unbelievers for instance) which are inspired by God.

49. This exegesis is similar to Augustine's in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 126, 2 and the *De civitate Dei* 17, 8.

possesses of its very nature, planted there by the Creator as a gift.⁵⁰ Cassian adds that unless these "seeds" are stirred to life by God's help, they will never grow and reach perfection. Nevertheless, Prosper sees in Cassian's statement a denial of the consequences of original sin by which these "seeds of virtues" are not in us any longer. Prosper's point of view is very much related to an often misunderstood Augustinian topic: the meaning of "virtuous" human actions. For Augustine and obviously for Prosper, there are certainly praiseworthy actions which indeed originated in nature, but they cannot be called true "virtues" because their authors are far from God, the creator of their nature. So for instance, there is no true "virtue" in the Stoics, for their deeds are not oriented towards God, but oriented towards a value given to the deeds themselves. This is not to say that Prosper did not recognize what we today would call naturally good acts. In fact, Prosper deals with this very issue in chapter 16 by an argument from Sacred Scripture. On one hand, when St. Paul praises the faith of the Romans and gives thanks to God for this virtue of theirs (Rom 1, 8) he did not mean to say that the believers did not deserve praise for their faith. But on the other hand, by praising the believers St. Paul did not mean to deny who is the author of their merit. Prosper gives other examples from 1 Cor 1, 4, Eph 1, 15-18 and Phil 1, 3-6. In each case their faith and good works of charity are said to deserve praise and merit. Yet for all these good actions St. Paul does not cease to give thanks to God knowing that they are his gifts. Furthermore, without the love of God as the ultimate reason for these actions they would not be "good" in themselves.

50. *Collationes XIII*, 12, 7 (CSEL 13, 380): "Dubitari ergo non potest inesse quidem omni animae naturaliter virtutum semina beneficio creatoris inserta."

In conclusion, Prosper never denied the possibility of "naturally good" actions. In fact, he explicitly talks about those people who receive God's call through the natural law in contrast to those whom God calls by the preaching of the gospel or by the Law in times before Christ (see his answers to the Gauls, 8). What he argues against is the view which held as "virtuous" those actions done in and for their own sake.⁵¹ Under these assumptions, Prosper is disturbed by the statements of Cassian who asserts that the centurion (in Mat 8, 8) would have deserved no praise nor gained any merit if Christ singled him out only because of something which he himself had given him.⁵² Prosper is puzzled that Cassian does not see himself contradicted by his own words.

Chapter 18 is a short summary of the entire discussion and in Chapter 19 we find twelve propositions which are taken from Cassian's text so as "to enable the readers to recall more easily what during the reading may have escaped their memory due to the interruptions of the answers given."⁵³ This

51. Of these actions Augustine writes: "Nam licet a quibusdam tunc verae et honestae putentur esse virtutes, cum ad se ipsas referuntur, nec propter aliud expetuntur; etiam tunc inflatae ac superbae sunt; et ideo non virtutes, sed vitia iudicanda sunt." *De civ. Dei* 19, 25 (PL 41, 656). This is the true meaning of the well known Augustinian phrase, "Nemo habet de suo nisi mendacium et peccatum"; si quid autem habet homo veritatis atque iustitiae, ab illo fonte est, quem debemus sitire in hac eremo, ut ex eo quasi guttis quibusdam irrorati non deficiamus in via." *323rd of Prosper's Sententiae and 22 canon from the synod of Orange* 529. The Augustinian meaning of this phrase has been so abused that the following proposition of Baius (obviously similarly worded) was condemned by Pius V in his bull *Ex omnibus afflictionibus* (Oct 1, 1567): "Omnia opera infidelium sunt peccata, et philosophorum virtutes sunt vitia."

52. *Collationes XIII*, 14, 4 (CSEL 13, 385): "Nullius enim laudis esset aut meriti, si id in eo Christus quod ipse donaverat praetulisset."

53. *Contra Collatorem* 19, 1 (PL 51, 266 A): "...ut quae interjectis responsionibus nostris, possent recordationem legentis effugere, facilius simul decursa recolantur."

summary is followed in chapter 20 by a further synthesis of Cassian's position which by its very succinctness probably magnifies what strict logic would necessarily demand from Cassian's texts. So in many respects it is not helpful.

Prosper concludes his work referring once again to the bitter Pelagian dispute, their condemnation and the attempted resurgence which he ascribes partly to the Massilians. Perhaps realizing how ultimately inadequate arguments are in the matter at hand, he states that the Massilian position should be countered best by the weight of authority.⁵⁴ Prosper finishes with the following advice: To endure with patience, return love for hate, to avoid disputes with the inept among them (the Massilians), to keep the truth and wait until the Lord be pleased to settle the controversy "through the princes of the Church and the lawful ministers of his justice."⁵⁵

2.8 DE VOCATIONE OMNIUM GENTIUM

This work does not properly belong to the Massilian controversy. It was written around 450 and although the Prosperian authorship is not beyond question, it is nowadays attributed to Prosper with some probability.⁵⁶ By the title of the work, one would be tempted to assume that it deals with the question of whether and how all nations or peoples can achieve salvation. However, the main theses of this bipartite work are the absolute

54. Ibid. 21, 4: "Igitur huiusmodi hominum pravitati, non tam disputationum studio quam auctoritatum privilegio resistendum est."

55. Ibid. 22: "...ut donec Dominus per Ecclesiae principes, et legitimos iudiciorum suorum ministros,..."

56. In a previous era Quesnel attributed this work to pope Leo I. In our own time G. de Plinval (art. cit.) also opposes the Prosperian authorship.

gratuitousness of divine grace and the universality of God's offer of grace. The author clearly maintains that there is no salvation except by the grace of God (cf. 1, 23; 2, 1) and furthermore, with characteristic Prosperian emphasis, that the *initium fidei* is effected also by that divine grace. Besides the basic theme of the absolute gratuitousness of divine grace discussed in the first part, the defense of the thesis that God wills the salvation of all occupies most of part two of the work.

Assuming the Prosperian authorship of the *De vocatione*, there is another subject which requires careful attention if one is to really understand Prosper's thought on the universality of grace. As we have seen, Prosper placed a great deal of emphasis in the inscrutability of God's judgments. In fact, Prosper's reverence towards the mysteries hidden in the *divinum propositum* and his deep awareness that the details and reasons of this *propositum* exceed our human grasp are the foundation for his thought on the problems of the divine salvific will and the doctrine of predestination. In chapter 9 the *De vocatione* states:

"Thus, with this faith firmly fixed in our hearts, it is most profitable for us to believe that all good things, especially those that are conducive to eternal life, are obtained, increased and preserved through God's gift. Pious minds should not be disturbed over whether all or not all men will be converted, if what is clear is not obscured by what is hidden and if we do not exclude ourselves by what is open by impertinently insisting on what is closed."⁵⁷

57. *De vocatione omnium gentium liber 1* (PL 51, 657 C, D): "Fixa ergo hac fide in cordibus nostris, immobiliterque fundata, qua saluberrime credimus omnia bona, ac maxime ea quae ad vitam aeternam provebunt, Dei munere haberi, Dei munere augeri, Dei munere custodiri; puto quod pius sensus non debeat in ea quaestione turbari, quae de omnium et de non omnium hominum conversione generatur, si ea quae clara sunt, non de his quae occulta sunt obscuremus, et dum procaciter insistimus clausis, excludamur ab apertis."

And later on in chapter 21 it adds: "What God has willed to remain hidden, should not be scrutinized; what he made manifest, should not be disregarded, lest we find ourselves illicitly curious and ungratefully damnable."⁵⁸ These two passages are exemplary of Prosper's basic appeal to differentiate between what is revealed and what is not and in no way do they betray any tendencies or influences of fideism or agnosticism as P. De Letter unfortunately has suggested. As Paul Hacker so well put it, "The gospel is not a collection of riddles for irreverent researchers to exercise their conceited acumen, but its message involves an appeal to do something. And the very first thing to do is the acknowledgment of the incomprehensible God in the adoration of love."⁵⁹

It is debated whether and to what extent Prosper modified Augustine's ideas on the divine salvific will and the associated topic of predestination. The different interpretations are based partly on the different conceptions of Augustine's teachings, that is, what exactly is "Augustinianism". The general consensus is that it is possible to discern a gradual decrease in the rigidity of Prosper's "Augustinianism" under the theory of three different periods; a period of no compromise (before Augustine's death), a period of partial concessions (immediately after) and finally, a period of broad concessions (the period during which the *De vocatione omnium gentium* was written). But in the next chapter, by comparing and contrasting all of Prosper's own writings, I will argue that in fact this alleged evolution cannot be deduced simply from Prosper's writings.

58. Ibid. (PL 51, 674 C): "Quae enim Deus occulta esse voluit, non sunt scrutanda; quae autem manifesta fecit, non sunt negligenda: ne et in illis illicite curiosi, et in istis damnabiliter inveniamur ingrati."

59. Paul Hacker, *The theological foundations of evangelization* (Steyler Verlag, 1980), p. 58.

The only other works of possible Prosperian origin with any connections with the Massilian controversy are, as I mentioned in chapter 1, the *Capitula* and the collection *Sententiarum ex operibus S. Augustini delibatarum*. Although of great historical significance, the latter work does not affect any argument presented in this paper since it is simply a collection of statements from Augustine's works. The *Capitula* or *Indiculus* is called so because it consists of 10 articles, which are considered official pronouncements of the Apostolic See on the issues of divine grace and free will. The *Capitula* prudently omits the difficult questions of predestination (which to date are open for debate since the Magisterium of the Church has not elaborated on these issues on predestination). Assuming the Prosperian authorship of the *Capitula*,⁶⁰ some have seen a move by Prosper away from the Augustinian teachings simply because Augustine is not mentioned by name in this work. But I will comment more on all this in the next chapter.

60. It is generally accepted that the *Capitula* is of Prosperian origins. However, we should note that there are certain similarities with the works of pope Leo I (*Patrologiae Latinae*, volume 54). See for instance, the comments of A. Hamman, op. cit., p. 557.

CHAPTER III

THEOLOGY OF GRACE IN PROSPER OF AQUITAINE

3.1 PROSPER'S USE OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Since so many of Prosper's arguments are from authority, a natural question to ask is: upon what authority or authorities do his arguments rest? For Prosper authority meant either the texts of Sacred Scripture, a reputable teacher of the Church, or the "legitimate ministers of God's justice."¹ But in fact, his cited non-biblical authorities (besides the obvious mention of Augustine and the pronouncements from the Apostolic See) are essentially non-existent. However, his references to Scripture are numerous by any standard. In his use of the Bible, Prosper is quite careful about the context of the texts, but sometimes to add rhetorical force to his argument he simply interweaves the sacred text itself into his own prose. This is the most obvious manner in which Prosper uses the Bible as an apologetical tool. Prosper articulates only one biblical exegetical rule (found in the letter to Rufinus). This rule asserts that to defend a proposition or a principle, only texts which cannot be understood in any other way but in favor of the given proposition or principle should be used. In other words, texts which can be quoted in opposition to the principle for whose proof they are quoted are, in general, invalidly used. To illustrate Prosper's method of biblical interpretation let us

1. *Contra Collatorem* (PL 51, 275 C): "...legitimos iudiciorum suorum ministros."

look at the manner in which he treats the texts used by the Massilians and in particular let us contrast Prosper with Cassian in their exegetical methods.

Both Cassian and Prosper use James 1, 17 ["Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."] to show the necessity of divine grace. Similarly, they use 2 Cor 9, 10 ["He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness."]. But in his attempt to discriminate between those who come to grace willing and those who come unwillingly, Cassian relies on Rom 10, 20 ["I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."]. Prosper rejects this distinction and tries to show the awkward result of Cassian's method which does not attend carefully to the context (e.g., Is 65, 1 which is the source of Rom 10, 20). Prosper states that the effect of grace in the human soul is precisely to prepare the human will so no one unwillingly could collaborate with divine grace. He also points out that no one who has the use of reason could come to faith in any other way than voluntarily.

Cassian's own use of Sacred Scripture is characterized by an attempt at what could be called an exegesis of equilibrium.² He marshals his evidence by collecting a large number of texts from Scripture which appear mutually contradictory. So for example he uses Rom 9, 16 ["So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy."] vis-a-vis Rom 2, 6 ["For he will render to every man according to his works."]. Or again Phil 2, 13 ["For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."] vis-a-vis Is 1, 19 ["If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land."]. It is apparent that Cassian uses many of these texts without focusing

2. In his dissertation, T. Smith has described the exegetical method of Faustus of Riez as a "hermeneutic of equilibrium" (p. 106).

on the context of the biblical passages. He is quick to conclude that these texts show the existence of both the grace of God and the human free will. But moreover, according to him, they show that sometimes we can conceive the desire for virtue of our own accord while other times we are in need of God's help.³ In order to see more clearly that at times the beginning of a good will arises from the gifts of nature bestowed by the Creator -- a beginning that however cannot reach the perfection of virtue without the guidance of God's help -- Cassian proposes Rom 7, 18 ["For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it."]. It becomes apparent that between Cassian's methodology of equilibrium and Prosper's rule of non-opposition there is simply no feasible resolution.

Prosper criticizes Cassian's use of Scripture not only for this methodology but for what Prosper perceives as a selective use of the Bible. So for example, in chapter 8 of the *Contra Collatorem*, Prosper cites a great number of texts which are not considered at all by Cassian but which are relevant to the issues at hand and somewhat unfavorable to Cassian's point of view.⁴ In this battle of texts and counter texts, it is of canonical significance to point out the following: A text from the book of *Wisdom* which Augustine had used in his teachings on predestination is rejected by the Massilians as not canonical.⁵ In turn, in his *XIII Conference* Cassian uses a text from the

3. The implicit idea seems to be that divine grace is somehow a rival to the human free will.

4. For instance, 1 Cor 12, 3; 4, 7; 15, 10; 7, 25; Eph 2, 8; Phil 1, 28; 2, 12; John 6, 66; 15, 5; 15, 16; 5, 21; Mt 16, 17.

5. In the *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, Augustine had quoted a work of St. Cyprian (*De mortalitate*) in which the text from Wisdom 4, 11 had been quoted. But according to Prosper, the Massilians rejected it: "Ubi et illud testimonium ponit de libro Sapientiae: *Raptus est, ne malitia mutaret intellectum eius*. Quod a me quoque positum, fratres istos ita respuisse

Shepherd of Hermas which Prosper promptly rejects as "nullius auctoritatis testimonium."⁶

As a particularly remarkable example of how Cassian's method of exegesis seems to ignore the context, Prosper points out Cassian's usage of Gen 3, 22 ["Behold, Adam is become like one of us, knowing good and evil."]. Cassian believes that this text shows that after sinning, Adam did not lose knowledge of the good and thus the "seeds of virtue" were still within him and his descendants. Prosper indicts Cassian's hermeneutics by pointing out that he speaks as if the promise of the devil had come true. In other words, Cassian's interpretation implies that by transgressing God's command Adam and Eve had grown in likeness to God, just as the serpent had promised them.⁷

Similarly, Prosper criticizes Cassian in his hermeneutics of a passage from Job in the Old Testament. According to Job 1, 9, Satan complains to the Lord Yahweh as follows:

"Does Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has and he will curse thee to thy face."

Cassian interprets the last sentence ("But put forth thy hand now, ...") as a challenge from Satan to God that Job be allowed to battle him with his own strength, without God's help. Cassian goes on to assert that since

dixistis, tamquam non de libro canonico adhibitum: quasi et excepta huius libri attestazione, res ipsa non clara ist, quam voluimus hinc doceri." *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 14, 26.

6. *Contra Collatorem* (PL 51, 250 C).

7. "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" Gen 3, 4-5.

Satan, so inclined to slander, does not dare to repeat this challenge after all of Job's trials and tribulations, the devil confesses by his own silence that he was defeated by the strength not of God but of Job himself. Although Cassian specifies that Job was not altogether left without divine help, "since God allowed Satan no more power than he knew Job was strong to withstand," Prosper asks if it would not be more correct to say that "God allowed Satan no more power than he had given Job strength to withstand."⁸

In summary, Prosper's exegetical method attends to the literal meaning of the texts and searches for clarifications by using a wide variety of related biblical passages. There is some measure of allegorical interpretation but in general Prosper focuses carefully on the literal meaning. He places a good deal of emphasis in the context of the text, much more so than Cassian who tends to use proof texts. For the most part Prosper comes across as an accomplished exegete.⁹ He does not simply graft biblical passages to his argument as decorations, although it would be very difficult to ascertain to what extent his doctrinal argument emerges from his exegesis.

3.2 ON PREDESTINATION AND THE DIVINE SALVIFIC WILL

Augustine's prolonged defense of the absolute gratuitous nature of divine grace forced him to delve deeper and deeper into the mystery of predestination.¹⁰ Quite naturally, the logic of his system and the questions

8. *Contra Collatorem* 15, 4 (PL 51, 258 B): "... Quantam et illium resistendi noverat habere virtutem; diceret potius, quantam et illi resistendi noverat se dedisse virtutem?" See also the *Collationes XIII*, 14, 2 for Cassian's own words.

9. One of Prosper's works (not relevant to this paper) is his exegetical *Expositio psalmorum*, a commentary on psalms 100 through 150.

10. By "predestination" we mean "the prescience and the preparation of God's gifts whereby those liberated are most certainly liberated" ("praescientia et praeparatio beneficiorum Dei,

that sprang forth from it often forced the great bishop of Hippo to take the risks of theological speculation. As a result of certain formulas deriving from these speculations, some of Augustine's expressions on the divine salvific will and predestination have been the subject of passionate debates, not only in the early fifth century, but throughout subsequent history. Some have seen in Augustine's teachings a system which asserts that not only has God elected some individuals from all eternity, but at the same time God has reprobated the remaining part of humanity to eternal damnation. Accordingly, this system also asserts that both classes of people are in absolute powerlessness to escape this irresistible situation which leads them accordingly either to good or evil actions.¹¹

Prosper's debate with the Massilians, first and foremost, also revolved around the absolute gratuity of divine grace. Naturally there were other interrelated theological issues at stake. Indeed, some of these issues have not been clearly resolved even today. But in discussing Prosper's exposition of predestination and the divine salvific will, the first thing we must avoid is to frame the issues anachronistically. We must always consider that from Prosper's point of view the fundamental issue at stake was the very idea of

quibus certissime liberantur quicumque liberantur." *De dono perseverantiae* 14, 35). I have noted that in this definition the word "praescientia" (prescience or more commonly translated as "foreknowledge") does not refer to God's "foreknowledge" of the merits of the elect. It simply means that in his prescience God has prepared the gifts which he intends for the elect so that in fact they are saved. This is the basis of Augustine's notion of a decisive and definite divine will which knows with certitude the number of the elect.

11. H. Rondet writes: "Thus, whenever future ages restudy Augustine's own thought, there will come along some intrasigent mind eager for systematization and ready to draw from his writings a mercilessly predestinarian synthesis. ... But there will also be solidly orthodox reactions on the part of faithful Augustinians who will try to correct Augustine with Augustine." *The Grace of Christ*, translated by Tad Guzie (Newman Press, 1966), p. 142.

grace as an unmerited gift of God. Prosper saw that the vindication which Augustine had won for this teaching against the Pelagians was threatened once again by the Massilians' tenets. Without this perspective, for instance, one easily misunderstands Prosper's insistence that Pelagianism was a "parent" of the Massilians tenets, which however far removed from those of the Pelagians, were at odds with the Catholic idea of grace as a pure gift. With this clearly established we may ask: What is Prosper's theology of grace? Or in other words, what is Prosper's contribution to the Church's understanding of grace, especially on the issues of the divine salvific will and predestination?

As we have seen, the Massilians interpreted the Pauline text that "God wills all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim, 2, 4) in a way which gave the human free will the essential decision whether one is saved or not. Augustine on the other hand -- arguing from the assumption that all are not saved and from a notion of an absolute and victorious divine will -- spoke often about what some have termed a "restricted" divine salvific will. But this is misleading because Augustine does not contradict 1 Tim 2, 4. He simply refers to the infallibly efficacious divine will that leads the elect to salvation. But God does not command what is impossible, so he must will in some way to make it really possible for all to comply with his commandments. Otherwise no one could avoid committing actual sin which in this case would no longer be sin or any divine punishment for such action would be a manifest injustice.

Augustine established all of the above, and without any restrictions he indeed stated that Christ died for all. But Prosper emphasized not only the reality of and the absolute gratuity in God's eternal choice of the elect but also the reality that this divine choice did not destroy either a true divine will to

save all nor did it suppress in any way the human free will. Naturally, the main objection which the Massilians presented was how to reconcile the assertions of this last statement. The Massilians did not believe these assertions could be reconciled.¹² They argued that the human free will decides one's own election or reprobation by consent or resistance to divine grace. In contrast to this opinion, Prosper maintained implicitly that only reprobation could be said to be the direct decision of the human free will. Moreover, the Massilians took a more rationalistic approach to the question while an important aspect of the problem in Prosper's view was our basic inability to scrutinize the reasons behind the divine choice.

The teaching of Prosper with respect to the divine salvific will is expressed best when he writes:

"It must be most sincerely believed and professed that God wills all to be saved. For the Apostle (1 Tim 2, 4) whose sentence this is, most insistently commands what is a most pious custom in all the churches, that prayers be offered to God for all; that many of these perish is the fault of those who perish; that many are saved is the gift of him who saves."¹³

In these words, Prosper formulates all the aspects of the mystery. Note that on the one hand Prosper maintains God's will to save all. On the other hand he insists on election as an absolute gift from God and reprobation as ultimately the fault of those reprobated.

Prosper's exposition on the divine salvific is based on the literal meaning of 1 Tim 2, 4. Unlike Augustine, he does not rely on any forced exegetical argument. Augustine had interpreted this text saying that God

12. For the Massilians, there was no predestination except in the sense that God ordains a reward or a punishment as the consequence of a given (foreseen) human action.

13. *Ad Cap. object. Vinc.* 2 (PL 51, 179 B and C).

does not will the salvation of each individual but only of some. However, as I have noted previously, Augustine spoke in this case only incidentally, not with a direct intention. At any rate, Augustine's formulations were given often in the context of that absolute and victorious will (*voluntas absoluta et victrix*) with which God absolutely wills the salvation of those actually saved. Of this will Augustine says, "The will of the Almighty is always invincible."¹⁴ Clear evidence that Prosper believed Augustine to hold to a true divine salvific will can be found in Prosper's response to the second Vincentian article in which Prosper protests against attributing to Augustine the supposition that God did not sincerely wish the salvation of all.

Significantly, Prosper also relies on an argument from the praxis of the Church who urges "that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all men." (1 Tim 2, 1) because "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour." (1 Tim 2, 3). This is one of the best examples of Prosper's application of the maxim "*legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*."¹⁵ In other words, for Prosper it was in the praxis of the Church to pray for all that one would find the ultimate demonstration that God wills all to be saved.

14. *Enchiridion* 102: "Omnipotentis voluntas semper invicta est."

St. John Damascene wrote: "God wills all to be saved initially. To make us partakers of his goodness, as good; but after we have sinned, he wills to punish us as just." ("*Deus praecedentur vult omnes salvari. Efficit nos bonitatis suae participes, ut bonus; peccantes autem punire vult, ut justus.*" *De Fide orthodoxa* 2, 29). On the other hand, St. Augustine seems in a few passages to think differently. In the *Summa Theologica* I, 19, 6, in an attempt to reconcile the two, St. Thomas Aquinas makes the well known distinction between the antecedent will of God and the consequent will of God. Historically, this distinction evoked even further explanations on the mystery of divine election. Eventually, everything came to a head at the *Congregatio de Auxiliis* (1598-1607). But the result was a stalemate, all sides being forbidden by Church authority to libel the other.

15. *Capitulum* 8 (PL 51, 209 D).

It is interesting to note that Augustine's more rigid formulations often came from his exegetical arguments.¹⁶ It is perhaps due to the absence of many of the Augustinian exegetical arguments that when Prosper speaks about reprobation his focus is less on the *massa damnata* outlook (emphasis on original sin) and more on demerits (emphasis on personal sin). This is not to deny Prosper's keen sense of original sin, which after all was at the root of his acceptance of God's judgment on unbaptized children. With regards to this last point, we should keep in mind that all parties involved in this controversy never formulated clearly any objection to the universal salvific will of God drawn from the case of children who die unbaptized. That is, they never formulated the following question: If God's will to save includes all, will unbaptized children perish without any fault of their own? Both the Massilians and Prosper only assumed the necessity of baptism. So in the debate itself this question was never an issue.¹⁷ However, the case of children who are baptized and die (and thus are saved) was used indeed by Prosper as the best evidence showing that human merits were not the deciding factor in election.

16. For instance, his exegesis of 1 Tim 2, 4. Also his exegesis of Romans (in particular Rom 9, 13 ["Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."] led him to his formulations of the *massa damnata* theory. But Augustine himself was clearly aware of the dangers of "cold" logic when he wrote: "Da mentem et sentit quod dico. Si autem frigidus loquor, nescit quid loquor." *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium* 26, 4 (PL 35, 1608).

17. It is noteworthy what Augustine writes when questioned directly about the fate of unbaptized infants; "Cum ad poenas ventum est parvulorum, magnis, mihi crede, coarctor angustiis, ne quid respondeam prorsus invenio." *Epistola* 166, *Ad Hieronymum* 6, 16.

Again we can speculate that Augustine's apparent rigidity in the case of unbaptized infants is due (to a great extent) to his exegetical argument from John 3, 3 coupled with his opposition to the Pelagian exegesis of John 14, 2 ["in my Father's house there are many rooms."]. While the Pelagians thought this text referred to different "places" in the kingdom of heaven, Augustine maintained that "multae mansiones diversas meritorum in una vita aeterna significant dignitates." *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium* (PL 35, 1812).

To summarize: Prosper clearly rejected the idea that divine election is the result of God's prescience of human merit. The idea of the absolute gratuity of divine grace was the reason behind this ["What have you that you did not received? 1 Cor 4, 7]. However, Prosper equally rejected the idea that God reprobates without regards to demerits. Otherwise, one is forced to abandon immediately the idea that "God wills all to be saved." In this regard, the author of the *De vocatione* had one original contribution in providing a meaning to the universal salvific will as expressed in 1 Tim 2, 4. Namely, God wills all to be saved means that God gives grace to all, though not in the same degree. Furthermore, everyone receives a *gratia generalis* but only some a *gratia specialis*. Only the latter actually attain salvation. The question as to why only some receive this special grace remained unanswered. However, it is stated that "grace prevails in some while nature recoils in others."¹⁸ This insight -- that a general grace is offered to all and that a special grace is offered to the elect, those who God knows will not "recoil from" that *gratia generalis*) -- seems to be a precursor of the distinction between sufficient and efficacious grace which theologians used and developed in later centuries.

Now let us address the issue of Prosper's place in history as an expositor of "Augustinianism" and his role in the eventual Church sanction in favor of some of Augustine's teachings. In particular we may ask, how faithful was Prosper to Augustine's thought and what was the dependence of Prosper's presentation of the issues of predestination and the divine salvific will on Augustine's own exposition? As far as predestination is concerned, I maintain that Prosper was a most faithful follower of Augustine, first and foremost in his refusal to identify predestination with divine foreknowledge of

18. *De vocatione omnium gentium liber II*, 25 (PL 51, 711 B): "sed in aliis praevaluisse gratiam, in aliis resiliisse naturam."

human merits. Nowhere in his writings do we find any ambiguity on this. However, some have perceived Prosper moving away from Augustine in other ways. P. de Letter tries to differentiate between a possible Prosperian evolution away from Augustine's expressions and Augustine's ideas on predestination. He sees in the *De vocatione omnium gentium* an "evident desire and an effective attempt to tone down Augustine's rigid expressions and views on predestination."¹⁹ He notes the "conspicuous absence" of all predestinational terminology. The terms in question are "praesciti" and "praeordinati" which are used instead of "praedestinati" in all cases except when quoting Scripture (for example, Eph 1, 3-6).

In trying to weigh the significance of this fact, I suggest there are other factors to consider. First of all, one must admit that the Prosperian authorship of this work is not beyond question. Even assuming that Prosper is the author of the *De vocatione*, one must deal with the fact that the *raison d'être* of this work is unknown, unlike Prosper's other works which were written in response to well known circumstances. But more to the point, Augustine himself was not enslaved by any terminology. For instance, Augustine often used "electi" even in the *De predestinatione sanctorum*. If we consider the negative connotations that the term "predestination" had developed by the middle of the fifth century²⁰, it should not be too surprising that an author would try to avoid using certain terminology, but not necessarily in order to dissociate

19. P. de Letter, ACW 14, p. 18.

20. For instance, the necessity to convoked a synod (Arles 473) to deal with "predestinarian" teachings.

himself from previously held views. Moreover, even de Letter admits that the Augustinian idea of predestination appears explicitly in the *De vocatione*.²¹

In evaluating the reasons for different terminologies one should recall also that in previous works (the *Contra Collatorem* for example) much of the so called "predestinarian" terminology was not used by Prosper either. Therefore, I maintain that it is more likely that Prosper is trying to keep his distance from predestinarian distortions of Augustine than from Augustine himself. The key observation is that the author of the *De vocatione* maintains a theory of election explicitly in line with the aforementioned definition of Augustinian predestination (see footnote 10 in this chapter).

In reality, the general statement that Prosper's theology of grace is or is not "Augustinian" is not helpful if one does not define what is meant by "Augustinian". This task could be the subject matter for several dissertations as well as a lifetime of studying the writings of St. Augustine. Therefore, my approach has been not to try to define "Augustinian" per se but to compare, first of all, Prosper with himself. This can be done only by examining all his writings, including the *De vocatione* allegedly written by Prosper some 25 years after his first works, the letters to Rufinus and Augustine. Of course, on very specific points I do compare and contrast Prosper with Augustine.

The theory that Prosper underwent an evolution, passing from an unconditional "Augustinian" to a more moderate stance is based to a great extent on a comparison of the *De vocatione* with Prosper's other works. The fact that there are some two decades separating these works should be reason enough to expect a natural development, especially on issues that were themselves in embryonic stages. But how marked is this development?

21. For instance, P. de Letter, ACW 14, p. 216 (footnote 301) and p. 217 (footnote 312).

In which issues is this alleged development seen? One of the principal expositors of this theory is D. M. Cappuyns who distinguishes between a first period of *intrasigeance*, followed by *les premières concessions* and finally some *grandes concessions* in Prosper's writings.²² But a reexamination of Prosper's early works, and a comparison between them and the *De vocatione*, indicates to me that the differences, in expressions and especially in ideas, are not such that this theory can be maintained without major alterations.

Cappuyns himself, in an earlier article ²³, tried to show the Prosperian authorship of the *De vocatione* on the basis of the following observations: A) the manuscript tradition which in a nearly unanimous fashion points to Prosper as the author, and B) his comparison of the *De vocatione* with other known Prosperian works which yielded, 1) a similarity of expressions and similar ways of developing ideas, 2) a similarity in the biblical references used, and 3) an identical teaching on practically all points of doctrine. Notice in particular the last observation made by Cappuyns. That is, after a close examination of the doctrinal parallelism between Prosper and the author of the *De vocatione*, Cappuyns himself concludes that there are no real differences in doctrine (p. 212). But he cannot have it both ways. On the one hand, in this first article, in order to prove that Prosper is the author of the *De vocatione* he argues that there are no real differences in doctrine. On the other hand, in his second article, he argues in favor of a theory of doctrinal change (not merely development) in Prosper's exposition, from period of

22. D. M. Cappuyns, "L'Augustinisme de Prosper D'Aquitaine." *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 1 (1929): 309-37.

23. "L' auteur du *De vocatione omnium gentium*." *Revue Benedictine* 39 (1927): 198- 226.

intrasigence to a period of great concessions. I understand this to mean that Cappuyens had found real differences by the time of his second article. But then, this would reduce considerably the strength of his argument in favor of the Prosperian authorship of the *De vocatione*.

Cappuyens wrote yet another article in which he points to the absence of Augustine's name from the *Capitula* as further evidence of Prosper's move to dissociate himself from "Augustinianism". But arguments from silence are notoriously hard to handle and this one in particular shows considerable weakness in the evidence.²⁴ But let us continue with our reexamination.

The main ideas of the *De vocatione* are explicitly: 1) the insistence on the absolute gratuity of divine grace and the error of those who hold that in preaching this "grace" one denies human free will, 2) that God wills all to be saved and that this salvation is due to divine grace, 3) that God's judgments are inscrutable. As far as 1) and 3) are concerned, the evidence I derive by direct comparison of all 7 of Prosper's works prior to 435 fails to reveal any real development, let alone a marked change in expressions or in any of the fundamental ideas.²⁵ On predestination itself, everyone agrees that the

24. D. M. Cappuyens, "L'origine des *Capitula* pseudo-célestiniens contre le sémipélagianisme." *Revue Benedictine* 41 (1929): 156-70.

Recall that the *Capitula* is the document traditionally attached to letter 21 of pope Celestine I to the Gallic bishops. This letter does mention (in fact praises) Augustine. Accordingly, even assuming Prosperian authorship, I fail to see the need for the *Capitula* to mention Augustine explicitly or to deduce that by failing to do so its author is abandoning any of Augustine's teachings on grace. This seems more a matter of prudence than anything else, especially when we are dealing with an authoritative document attempting to settle doctrinal issues between conflicting parties, where the names are not relevant and in fact could hinder the resolution of the issues.

25. I am assuming the following chronology of Prosper's relevant works in the controversy: 1) the letter to Rufinus, 2) the letter to Augustine, 3) the poem *Carmen de ingratis*, 4) the answer to the Genoese, 5) Prosper's response to the Gauls and 6) to the so called Vincentian articles, 7) the *Contra Collatorem*. In fact these are all his known works prior to 435. After this date we have two other relevant works of alleged Prosperian origins, the

Augustinian definition appears explicit even in the *De vocatione*. The fact that Prosper emphasizes that the reprobates owe their reprobation to their sins need not be seen as a "softening" in the Augustinian teaching of predestination. As a matter of fact, a nuanced discussion of the Augustinian teaching on predestination should distinguish carefully between expressions referring to the elect and expressions referring to the reprobate.²⁶ Augustine's teaching is simply augmented when Prosper speaks about reprobation (not when he speaks about election).

Inasmuch as all humanity has sinned in Adam,²⁷ Augustine spoke of a *massa damnata* but never meaning an arbitrary divine decree which assigns certain people to be eternal reprobates. Prosper alludes to this in his letter to Rufinus but he focuses more on reprobation as a result of personal sins

Capitula and *De vocatione*. There are several other works which are not directly associated with the controversy and so they are not taken into consideration in the present discussion.

26. Cf. Our previous quotation from Augustine's debate with Felix the Manichean, as well as his *De correptione et gratia* 13, 42 (written c. 426) where Augustine speaks of the reprobates as those who desert God and in turn are deserted. William Most has pointed out that in Augustine, aside from his *massa damnata* outlook of humanity, we can find a teaching of predestination without merits which emphasizes reprobation depending on demerits (*Novum tentamen ad solutionem de Gratia et Praedestinatione*, Editiones Paulinae, 1963, pp. 208ff. The following passages from Augustine's works are also relevant to this point: *De diversis quaest.* 83, 68, 5 (written between 388 and 395); *De catechizandis rudibus* 52 (written 399); *De peccat. mer. et rem.* 2, 17, 26 (first work of the Pelagian controversy written c. 412); *Tractus in Ioan. Evang.* 53, 6 (written between 413 and 418); Most's observation that this view is present in Augustine's writings basically from the beginning of his career to his death, without retraction or amendment is illustrated by the dates of composition of the various works.

27. Christ and his mother excepted. Augustine himself states: "Excepta itaque sancta virgine Maria, de qua propter honorem Domini nullam prorsus cum de peccatis agitur, haberi volo quaestionem: unde enim scimus quod ei plus gratiae collatum fuerit ad vincendum omni ex parte peccatum, quae concipere ac parere meruit, quem constat nullum habuisse peccatum."

known by God in his prescience rather than on original sin. This focus left Prosper with the difficult case of unbaptized infants, a case which he did not consider fully and which even today remains a difficult case to explain using any theory that does not fall into a universalism which has never been acceptable to the mind of the Church. Even in the case of adults, Prosper's focus leaves the theology of grace appearing less "rigid" but perhaps more shrouded in mystery for the question of why God permits certain individuals to sin without efficaciously intending that their sins be forgiven and the universal salvific will expressed in 1 Tim 2, 4 are hard to reconcile.²⁸ In fact, the *De vocatione* begins by defining this problem when it states:

Among the defenders of free will and the preachers of the grace of God, a great and difficult question has been debated for a long time. The point at issue is whether God wills all to be saved; and since this cannot be denied, why is the will of the Almighty not realized? When the latter is said to happen because of the human will, grace seems to be excluded; and if grace is given as a reward for merits, it is not a gift but something owed. But then, why is this gift, without which no one is saved, not given to all by him who wants all saved? Thus, there is no end to the disputations as long as it is not discerned between what is manifested and what remains hidden."²⁹

Notice that for Prosper it is a given that God wills all to be saved. For Augustine, in view of his insistence that the reprobate could be justly condemned even by original sin, this divine will to save all was not an

28. I say even more shrouded in mystery since the *massa damnata* view based on original sin at least explains the "justice" behind an otherwise unknown reason for non-election.

29. *De vocatione omnium gentium liber 1* (PL 51, 648-9 A): "Inter defensores liberi arbitrii, et praedicatores gratiae Dei, magna et difficilis dudum vertitur quaestio. Quaeritur enim utrum velit Deus omnes homines salvos fieri; et quia negari hoc non potest, cur voluntas Omnipotentis non impleatur inquiritur? Cumque hoc secundum voluntatem hominum fieri dicitur, gratia videtur excludi; quae si meritis redditur, constat eam non donum esse, sed debitum. Unde iterum quaeritur cur hoc donum, sine quo nemo salvus est, ab eo qui omnes salvare vult, non omnibus conferatur. Atque ita, contrariarum disputationum nullus terminus reperitur, dum non discernitur quid manifestum, quid sit occultum."

emphasis. But a more nuanced approach would distinguish among Augustine's different uses of the word will. Whatever lack we find in Augustine the exegete -- in his attempts to explain the text of 1 Tim 2, 4 by saying that "all" meant "many" or the actual "elect" or "from every class or race of men" -- there is no doubt that Augustine the theologian, leaving intact the absolute gratuity of divine grace, always admitted a universal salvific will. If one were to find evidence in Augustine's works that the reprobates were positively rejected independently of human action (as he asserts the elect are chosen), then we would have to admit that Augustine indeed held to a "restrictive" salvific will. But this is not the case.³⁰ The most that could be said is that for Augustine the divine salvific will is not absolute in the sense that there are reprobates.

Without underestimating the "harshness" of this position, it is clear that Prosper understands the divine salvific will very much in the same manner (see his formulation of the problem in the above quotation). And so even at this level, Prosper remains quite in line with Augustine's thought. In the final analysis, as Henri Rondet has pointed out, it is inaccurate to speak of Augustine's harshness or pessimism because Augustine, like St. Paul, after speaking of falling humanity immediately highlights his statements by an insistence on God's power and mercy. No doubt, the most "rigid" text of Augustine is the dreadful picture of humanity which he paints as a consequence of the sin of our first parents. In this text from his *Enchiridion* (27), the *massa damnata* terminology appears embarrassing to modern eyes. If God had let all of humanity perished, Augustine says, no one could have said he was unjust. After all, it happened with the fallen angels. But

30. Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo; life and controversies*, Canterbury Press Norwich (1988) ch. 9, p. 388.

immediately Augustine adds that God is merciful and his mercy is shown in those whom he saves through grace.

In conclusion, I believe that Prosper's exposition is quite faithful to Augustine's thought. It could be said that Prosper "corrected Augustine with Augustine" in explaining reprobation with an emphasis on personal demerits. Using a more balanced method, Prosper maintained the universal salvific will in God together with a notion of divine predilection. If Prosper is indeed the author of the *De vocatione* he provided an original idea on the meaning of the divine salvific will by distinguishing between a "general" grace and an "special" grace. This distinction, by the very nature of the issues, admittedly still left some points obscured (and they remain so even today). But here Prosper contributes yet something else of equal importance; his constant reminder to posterity of the value of that advice which Augustine so well expressed: "Let us allow God to be capable of something which we must admit we are not capable of scrutinizing."³¹

31. *Epistola* 137, 2, 8: "Demus Deum aliquid posse, quod nos fateamur investigare non posse."

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The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

11/29/87
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